"LET 'EM HAVE IT NOW. WE'RE RIGHT OVER A BIG BUILDING."

AIR SERVICE BOYS FLYING FOR FRANCE

OR

THE YOUNG HEROES OF THE LAFAYETTE ESCADRILLE

BY

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"AIR SERVICE BOYS OVER THE ENEMY'S LINES"

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CHAPTER I

THE AIRPLANE CHUMS

"Now then, good luck to you, Tom! Tell me how it feels to look down on the world from the clouds."

"Oh, I expect to have a high old time, Jack—three thousand feet of it, in fact. And my nerves seem to be as steady as ever."

"You're a lucky boy, all right, to get this chance to try for altitude after being in the harness at the aviation field for only two months."

"But my instructor tells me I was born for the life of a birdman, Jack."

"I know you've talked, read, and dreamed of little else these two years back. And now, Tom, at last the germ has caught me almost as fiercely in its grip."

"Yes, old boy, it means the pair of us working tooth and nail now, learning to fly, so when the time comes, we can take our places for Uncle Sam in the great game. And it isn't going to be so very far off now, with that fearful war raging across the sea."

"Well, look out for yourself, Tom. I'm going

to keep you in focus with my binoculars every minute of the time. Whenever you take a dip my heart will jump right up into my throat, I know. Lieutenant Carson gave you a limit, of course?"

"I'm to keep one eye on my recording barometer, and when it registers a full three thousand feet in height I'm to commence to volplane down. And my instructor is a man whose orders you've got to obey to the letter."

"No trouble for you to do the trick, Tom, because you come of a family of inventors and dabblers in mechanics. It's different with me, for I have to pound things into this dull head of mine. I'll wait around till you drop down again."

"Wish you would, Jack, for I've got something to tell you; news that has been giving me something to worry about."

"I knew that letter you had must have contained bad news, Tom; and I've been waiting to hear you say something about it. There! Lieutenant Carson is waving his hand for you to get a move on. I envy you, that's a fact. So-long, Tom."

Another minute, and the airplane in which Tom Raymond sat was trundling along over the even surface of the aviation field, gaining speed as its engine warmed to the work.

Jack Parmly stood and watched with keen interest. Not that he entertained the slightest doubt concerning the ability of Tom Raymond to accomplish this new test which the flying-master had imposed on the aspiring students. Jack believed Tom equal to anything that any other aviator could carry out, given a little time for practice.

They were great friends, and had been ever since childhood. They lived in the town of Bridgeton, Virginia. As Jack had hinted, Tom's father was an inventor, and several successful labor-saving devices were associated with his name. He had also perfected more than one apparatus useful in the saving of life at sea and in time of accident.

Since the great World War had broken out in Europe Mr. Raymond was devoting his talents to an altogether different task—that of discovering means for bringing the conflict to a speedy close by giving the advantage to the side whose cause he favored.

Tom, usually a quiet, reserved lad, had always been deeply interested in aeronautics. From childhood he had read every book or article he could get hold of that contained accounts of balloon voyages, and later on records of the progress made in airplane building and manipulation.

When the Wrights were starting on their wonderful experiments with a heavier-than-air flying-machine Tom began to lose interest in his school studies, for his brain was filled with the amazing possibilities that awaited a successful termination of their work and that of the French experimenters who were working along similar lines.

Time passed on, and with the breaking out of the European conflict the race to utilize this discovery led to rapid rivalry in the field of aviation. Things were becoming of everyday occurrence that but three years back would have been considered utterly impossible.

The fever continued to burn with ever-increasing strength in Tom Raymond's veins until he could be restrained no longer. His father, realizing that it was of no use to try to deny him his one consuming wish, made arrangements for him to go to the nearest Government aviation field where a school for novices who aspired to learn how to fly was being organized. This was located in Virginia.

Jack Parmly had anticipated this action, and somehow had managed to influence his widowed mother to allow him to accompany his chum. Mrs. Parmly was of long American lineage and intensely patriotic. Though it grieved her sorely to give up her only son, she

believed that his country had the first claim upon his services.

Her husband had been a volunteer officer during the Spanish war; though retiring again to private life at its close; and from away back to the Revolution the Parmly family, as well as her own, had always taken their parts in the wars of their country.

It will be seen, therefore, that these two comrades although quiet and studious came honestly by their adventurous spirit, and also the desire to be of service to their country.

Of course, like all beginners both of the boys had passed through a number of rather thrilling experiences while learning how to manipulate the motors of their airplanes alone. At first an instructor had always accompanied them. They also flew at a low altitude, and by slow degrees advanced along the path of knowledge until finally each was allowed to go up alone.

Once Jack landed with such force that his plane was badly damaged, and he himself had to lay off from work several days because of sundry bruises and contusions received in the tumble.

Then, on another occasion, something happened to Tom's engine when he was trying his first ascent to a height of a thousand feet or

more. When he found that it suddenly refused to obey his bidding Tom felt a spasm of alarm, but he did not lose his head, fortunately.

He started to volplane down, though afraid that his landing would be of a nature to bring about a terrible smash. However, nothing so serious as that occurred, for when two-thirds of the way to the ground his engine began to work again, in response to his eager appeal; and after all he was able to continue his flight.

At present they had both reached a stage in their education that allowed considerable latitude in further ventures. And Tom was now about to undertake a feat that would stamp him as being a genuine aviator capable of attempting extended flights.

Tom had now commenced to fly upward. The little airplane had its nose pointed toward the fleecy clouds floating high in the air above him. Up, and still up the airplane mounted in dizzying spirals. The machine was a good one of modern build, suited for the general work of a novice, still learning how to control his craft alone.

Later on, Tom would discover that the necessities of modern warfare have compelled the cunning artificers of France and Germany and Great Britain to invent a variety of airplanes, each intended for a special purpose. But that

was a page in the young fellow's career not yet turned.

Presently the airplane was almost like a dot in the heavens. Indeed, with the naked eye it was hard to distinguish it from a flying bird. Now and again it temporarily disappeared entirely amidst the white clouds that lay scattered across the sky, to Jack's eyes resembling marching battalions hurrying to get in battle formation.

Jack, equipped with his powerful glasses, could easily follow the course of his chum. Just as he had said, he did not leave the spot for a minute, but kept faithful watch and ward. He was as deeply interested in the carrying out of Tom's latest venture as though he himself were the one to profit through its successful issue.

They had been at the aviation school—the first the United States Government really established before breaking into the great war—just two months. Every day that the weather conditions allowed both of the ambitious young fliers kept hard at work under the able army officer connected with the Signal Corps, who had become the instructor in the school.

Tom had advanced so rapidly and shown such evident signs of proving a marvel in the work of flying, that his progress had been

much swifter than Jack's. Already he had been allowed to go up unaccompanied and practice various evolutions that were in line with his steady advancement.

This altitude test was one of the last, just as it is possibly the most nerve-trying. Objects look so very strange when seen from a great distance up in the air; and the conditions surrounding the novice are so greatly in contrast with those closer to the earth, that the first trial trip is always watched with considerable solicitude by the instructor.

Jack heaved a sigh of relief when he discovered that his chum was finally coming down from the dizzy height. Both of them had become proficient in the highly important operation of shutting off the engine, pointing the nose of the airplane toward the earth, and volplaning swiftly downward.

It was one of the very first things they had learned, since it is hardly possible to make a safe landing without a perfect knowledge of this necessary art. Tom came rushing down with increased speed. The wind was whistling in his ears, and without his goggles he would have found it impossible to see on account of the tears the cold atmosphere would have forced into his eyes.

Adroitly, when the proper time came, he

changed the line of flight of his airplane to that of the horizontal and the broad wings soon caught the air. Eventually the machine touched the ground with tail and wings at the same time, bumped along for a certain distance, its speed becoming slower and slower until it stopped directly in front of Jack.

"Splendidly done!" exclaimed Jack Parmly, his face beaming with pleasure and pride in his chum. "Tom, you're surely a wizard when it comes to air work! But all the same I'm glad to see you safe back on the earth again. Here comes Lieutenant Carson to congratulate his most promising pupil."

The army officer hurried up, hand extended.

"You have fulfilled my expectations fully, Tom," he said, in his quiet fashion. "Another time you must strive to reach the six-thousand-feet altitude, but there are some other things I'd like to have you become proficient in first. You still have a few faults, common to all beginners. Perhaps they are not very serious in themselves; but even trifles may imperil an aviator's life, and these should be corrected in the beginning."

That was all he said, then turned away to give his attention to others among his pupils, for there were a number practicing daily at the new school of aviation. Indeed, the desire to

learn to fly was rapidly becoming a fever in the veins of a multitude of daring young Americans; and when the time came for Uncle Sam to need a host of skilled aviators thousands would eagerly avail themselves of the opportunity to serve their country in that fascinating if dangerous way.

Tom had finished his work for the day, and, as Jack was also through, the two walked away in company, to change their clothes at the hangar where they kept their street garments. A mechanician took charge of the airplane, and would see that it was properly cleaned, as well as restored to its shed until needed again. These men took the place of hostlers at the training camp, doing all the ordinary repairing, and fetching the planes out for the fliers when needed.

Later on the two young fellows left the field and proceeded toward the station where they could take a car for town, where they had a room.

"Please don't forget," remarked Jack, as they were riding toward the town they called home in those days, "that you promised to let me know what your bad news was. I saw you get the letter, and at first hoped you'd heard something from that steamship company you wrote to. Was it really from home, and did

it contain something that hit you hard? I hope it won't interfere with the plans we've been making for going across to France."

"On the contrary," said Tom, soberly, "it may hasten my departure. You see, it gives me fresh reason to hate the cause of the Kaiser. But wait until we get to our room and I'll tell you all about the disaster that has given my father the worst blow of his whole life."

Jack felt more eager than ever to hear what his comrade had to say. His interest in everything that concerned Tom was almost as keen as though it had to do with his own fortunes. So as soon as they were comfortably seated in their room at a private house in the Virginia town, he turned an expectant face toward the other. His eager expression influenced Tom to keep his promise without delay.

"It concerns a certain invention on which father has been working night and day for nearly a year now," Tom began.

"Oh! That airplane stabilizer you once told me about?" quickly demanded the other.

"Yes, Jack. It baffled his utmost skill for a long time, but lately he believed he had found the great secret that would make airplanes almost as safe to use as motor cars on the public highways."

"You always said he was bound to get it

if he lived," Jack went on. "But how was it your father turned to airplane experimentation, when he was never up in one in his life?"

"I suppose my wildness to fly had something to do with it; but there was a stronger motive. Father always looks far into the future; and, like many other people since this terrible war has started and airplanes are taking such a big share in the fighting, he believes that the nation able to muster the most efficient fleet of monster fliers capable of carrying tons and tons of destructive explosives, will win."

"I see now where you got that idea, Tom; for I've heard you speak of it more than once. Yes, and I believe the same thing. That is one reason I'm here at the aviation school learning to serve my country and the cause of democracy in the world. But go on. Tell me more about it."

"Just when father felt absolutely certain that he had solved the problem," continued Tom dejectedly, "a terrible disaster came upon him as suddenly as a bolt from the blue."

"Was it a fire that destroyed his papers and set him back in his calculations?" demanded Jack.

"Oh, much worse than that!" came the answer. "A part of the design was stolen. He says he will in time probably be able to

make it good, so that isn't the worst of it. He fears the stolen paper may get into the hands of the German high authorities on aeronautics and prove of priceless value to them in their further conduct of the war!"

CHAPTER II

LOOKING FORWARD TO ACTION

JACK looked aghast at hearing Tom say this.

"Has he some good reason for fearing such a thing, Tom?" he hastened to ask.

"He has," came the other's reply. "There was a German who tried hard to get on friendly terms with my father. He finally hinted very broadly that his Government, in order to secure the secret of the new stabilizer, stood ready to double any amount of money our Government at Washington had offered."

"Whew! then he must have been a secret agent of Wilhelmstrasse!" suggested Jack, with bated breath.

"There's not the slightest doubt about it." And Tom frowned and looked very determined. "No one could have made such a promise unless he was in close touch with the German Legation at Washington and the pay agents of the Kaiser in New York City."

"Of course your father refused to consider any offer from German sources," continued Jack, eagerly.

"He was very angry at being approached by an agent of a Government with which the United States was likely to go to war at any time since the *Lusitania* was sunk. He told this Adolph Theissig what he thought of his nerve, and I guess must have shown him the door in a hurry, for I know father's temper."

"And what happened next, Tom?"

"Well, father was so busy just then on another experiment that he neglected to take proper precautions, a fact he is bitterly sorry for now. The time to shut and lock the stable door is when the horse is still safe inside. But then you know inventors are not like ordinary people, Jack; they live up in the clouds much of the time; and my father was always a great hand for putting off things."

"Too bad, Tom, for I can begin to see this was one time that failing got him into trouble. So the paper was stolen, was it?"

"No question about it, Jack, for father found his room had been entered, and the safe in which he kept many of his private papers, forced open and rummaged. But as luck would have it, he carried one of the papers in his pocket at the time, so that although the thief took the other away with him, it may be possible that even the clever airplane builders over on the Rhine or on Lake Constance, will

have a hard time puzzling out the real meaning of his figures and incomplete design."

"They are a keen bunch, though," said Jack, looking worried, "and if they set their minds to it the chances are th y'll succeed in the end. But perhaps the thief may realize he has not secured the precious paper he was after, and on that account fail to deliver it to the German Embassy at Washington?"

"Father, hopes that may turn out to be so," replied Tom. "But remember, Jack, this is to be kept a dead secret. Father has good reasons for not wishing it to become known to the Government yet; though you must understand there's nothing dishonorable about his motives."

"I'll never breathe a word of it, Tom, you can depend on that. But doesn't he mean to put the case in the hands of the Secret Service men? They might manage to recover the paper before it falls into the hands of the enemy."

"But to do that, don't you see, he would have to take the Government into his confidence, which he is loth to do just yet. No, he has hired a detective of national reputation, John Mullins, who is even now on the trail, and he hopes to intercept the thief. But since Washington is not many hours away from our home town by rail, it may be that the precious

paper was in the legation safe before my father even learned of his loss."

"But why should your father hesitate about letting the authorities at Washington know of his loss, Tom? Perhaps they might help him find that paper before the thief had found a chance to get it out of the country."

Tom sighed heavily.

"I think father has a fear that some jealous rival of his might circulate the report that the paper had not been stolen at all; and that the supposed robbery was only a clever ruse on his part to deceive the Government. In plain words, Jack, that my father, who would die before betraying his country, had conspired to sell his invention at an enormous price to the Germans."

"That would be a terrible thing for any American to say of another!" Jack asserted, indignantly.

"Still, there are men who would be guilty of throwing out such base hints; and you know how these are magnified by the public. Father is doubly troubled, you can see. I would give a great deal if only I could in some way be able to recover that stolen paper, and put it safely back in father's hands."

"You've made me feel bad, Tom. I sympathize with your father, because I know from

all you've told me that he expected this to be the crowning feat of all his inventions. And then, besides, his loss may make Germany the commanding nation of the whole world. Yes, it's a great misfortune. I wish we could do something to recover that stolen paper."

"Oh, I'd give years of my life if I only could, Jack! But it's no use to dream of such a thing. Still, I suppose I will do that very thing—dream of it—and often wake up in the belief that I've cornered this Adolph Tuessig and forced him to hand over father's latest and biggest achievement."

"I can easily understand just how you feel. It may be the thing will work on my mind too, so that I'll also dream I'm handing that paper back to your dad, proudly telling him how we hunted the German spy down and forced him to disgorge. But you said this misfortune at home wouldn't cause you to change your plans any, didn't you?"

"I shall be more eager than ever to get a whack at the Kaiser, because it was one of his miserable spies who robbed my father of his secret. Our folks have already given their consent, and if only we can get passage aboard a steamer there's nothing to keep us from going across to France, who is eager to accept all the aviators she can get on the battlelines."

Jack had apparently been a little anxious concerning this part of the programme. Considerably relieved, he thrust out his hand and squeezed the fingers of his comrade heartily as he went on to say:

"Ever since we concluded to offer our services to France, when we felt satisfied we had learned the rudiments of flying, the idea has taken a firm root in my mind; and, Tom, I'd be terribly disappointed if anything happened to break up our pet plan."

"No more than I would, Jack. You know my passion for being in the air. And now that this cause for hating the Germans has come along, it's added fire to my zeal. I tell you it would have to be something pretty serious that could cause me to back down at this late stage."

"Then," said Jack triumphantly, "we're booked for France, if only the steamship people will let us take passage. And from all accounts, they're not likely to put any obstacle in our way, knowing what our motive is and that we are able to pay their price."

"But surely by now I ought to have heard something to that effect from the New York agent I wrote to," argued Tom.

"Better try again," suggested his companion. "Letters sometimes go astray, you know, and he may never have received it."

"Oh, I was wise enough to register the letter," Tom told him; "so I know it was safely delivered. Like as not he's taking his own time to answer, because sailings are not frequent in these days of submarine horrors. They never advertise what day the boat is expected to leave, always informing would-be passengers to be aboard at a certain time, although the vessel may remain in the harbor for another day or two. All that is done to prevent spies from sending by wireless information connected with the sailing to the other side, and which in turn would be communicated to the waiting U-boats."

There was a ring of the bell.

"That was the postman, Tom. I wonder now if he had anything for you," remarked Jack, who chanced to be sitting near the window where he could look out and observe all that was taking place in the street.

"I'll go down and see," his chum remarked, jumping up hurriedly; and Jack noticed that Tom, usually so composed and cool, was showing the effect of his late nervous strain in flying, now supplemented by this fresh cause for anxiety.

Tom returned in a few minutes. He held an open letter in his hand. One look Jack took at his beaming face, and then he too jumped hastily to his feet.

"It must be good news, Tom, this time!" he ejaculated.

"Well, it is, for a fact!" shouted the other in excitement. "We're booked to sail on the twelfth! Here are our instructions to be on hand the preceding evening, ready to start!"

Impulsive Jack threw his arms around his chum, and actually gave him a bearish hug. It was plain to be seen that the greatest ambition of his life was on the point of being gratified, and he was correspondingly happy.

"Then perhaps within two weeks or so we may be standing on French soil, and dropping in at that wonderful aviation school at Pau, about which, since coming here, we've heard so much from Lieutenant Carson. Won't the other fellows be envious though, when they learn about our great good luck? Hurrah!"

CHAPTER III

GOOD-BYE TO THE AVIATION SCHOOL

After the receipt of the letter from the steamship company, things began to happen with increasing swiftness in the lives of Tom Raymond and Jack Parmly.

On the following day they meant to say good-bye to Lieutenant Carson and the assemblage of young fellows who were, like themselves, learning the lessons of aviation under the direction of the capable Signal Corps officer.

First of all they sought out the officer, who had just sent up into the air an assistant with a promising student who showed signs of making his mark in flying, and who was just as eager as the two chums to go across the sea to where they would find stirring action.

"What great news are you bringing with you to-day, boys?" demanded the lieutenant, as soon as he turned and saw them approaching, their faces beaming, and their eyes sparkling with happiness. "But why ask that when I can see you've got your wish at last, and

that we're going to lose two of our most advanced pupils from the school here?"

"We sail in six days, Lieutenant," said Tom, joyously. "I had a favorable letter from the steamship company yesterday afternoon."

"Yes," added Jack, unable to keep silent and with heart pounding loudly with happiness against his ribs, "and it's hard to believe that within twenty days we may be watching those adept French fliers at the great Pau School do all kinds of acrobatic feats up in the air."

"Don't be too sure of that, Jack," warned the more conservative Tom. "Remember we have three thousand and more miles of ocean to cross before we can hope to land on French soil. And in the barred zone dozens of German submarines are waiting to smash our vessel with their villainous torpedoes."

"One thing I want to do before you leave here to-day for good," continued the friendly officer. "And that is to give you a letter of introduction to my younger brother. I believe I told you that he was flying for France, and when I last heard from him he was a member of the famous Lafayette Escadrille. You will like Phil, I am sure. He has already won the right to be called an ace, having brought down his fifth enemy plane some months ago."

"Some day," said Tom, speaking from his heart, "perhaps both of us may win that honor,

and wear the French War Cross in addition. I often dream of such things, you know, Lieutenant, for my every thought is given to flying, and serving the cause of democracy. It must run in the blood, I think."

When the news went around that the two chums were actually booked to sail for the other side they became the center of a boisterous and envious crowd. Every youth present eyed them with a greedy look, for were they not all longing to have just such a piece of good fortune strike them?

"It's better to be born lucky than rich!" declared one keen-eyed young man, who was the most advanced of all those in training at the big camp. "I've been indulging in dreams that perhaps I'd be the first to sail for France, because my instructor tells me I'm ready to graduate any day now. But the lightning had to strike in another quarter."

"We'll be watching for you to follow, Dawes," said Tom warmly, for he had always liked the young fellow and believed he had a bright future before him. Unless— Well, every one knows what terrible risks aviators take in war times, and that even the best and most wonderful fliers are apt to meet their fate some day while on duty.

Wherever Tom and Jack went they were the

center of an admiring and envious crowd. Indeed, for the morning it seemed as though the business of the school was to be sadly interfered with, for this was really the first break in their ranks. Still, the wind was blowing a little too stiffly for any novice to think of ascending, even in company with a skilled pilot.

To go to France! Ah! that was the yearning that burned in the hearts of every one present. Daily they read of wonderful achievements that were being accomplished by those daring birdmen of all the armies in the field, and envy gripped their souls as they dreamed of the glorious day coming when they, too, might be allowed to go to the front, accomplishing deeds that would place their names on the scroll of fame.

Lieutenant Carson did not forget his promise. He managed to dash off the letter of introduction to his younger brother, who was daily risking his life in the service of France, trying to pay back a small portion of the great debt America has owed ever since, in the days of the Revolution, France sent Lafayette and Rochambeau across to help win her independence from Great Britain.

There was a look of deep concern on the stern officer's face as he handed the letter to Tom.

"It may never be delivered," he said simply. "The life of an army aviator is a precarious one. To-day he is in perfect health; to-morrow he meets the enemy high in the air, and his end has come. But if Phil is yet alive when you get to the front, tell him his family are proud of what he has already done to stay the hand of the common foe of democracy."

He turned hastily away on saying this. Jack realized that the younger brother must have been a great favorite in the Carson home, and that news of his meeting a sudden death would come as a terrible blow to those who loved him so dearly. Tom often wondered whether he would ever have the pleasure of meeting Phil Carson in the dim future.

It was now time for the two chums to return to town to pack their belongings and catch the afternoon train for Washington, where they meant to spend a few days before going to their more distant homes.

Business was suspended for the time being in the camp. A score of young fellows, garbed in their flying togs, and ranging from the nearly graduated Dawes to the latest rookie, flocked around them to give a parting handshake and wish them a successful voyage across the water.

Besides, there were many mechanicians and other attaches of the camp who seemed to feel

an interest in the fortunes of the pair; though possibly not many of them really aspired to take the same desperate chances that Tom and Jack were about to face.

"Hope the subs don't get you, boys!" called out one man. "They're growing pretty hungry, all accounts say, and any day now we expect to hear of another sinking that'll be nearly as terrible as the *Lusitania.*"

CHAPTER IV

STARTING FOR FRANCE

"Just to think of it, Tom," Jack Parmly was saying some time afterwards, as he sat before a fire in his chum's den, for they had been home some days, "to-night will be the last we expect to spend with our folks for a long while."

"Yes," added the other boy, a bit seriously. "And to tell you the truth, Jack, I really wish the parting was over. Father and mother don't say much, but I can see by their eyes they've been lying awake these last nights worrying about me. This parting from the family is the hardest part of the whole business to me."

"Yes, my mother is trying to smile through it all," said Jack soberly, winking very fast as he spoke for some reason or other, though Tom did not seem to notice the fact. "She has the soul of a true patriot. Years ago when we were at war with Spain, she let father go to the front without a complaint. My aunt told me that many times she found mother crying in secret; yet to the world she always seemed to be as calm and contented as if father had been at

her side. No fellow ever had a finer mother, Tom."

"There's only one fly in the ointment, according to my mind," continued the other, frowning as he spoke.

"I can guess what you mean," said Jack. "You're still thinking of that scoundrel, Adolph Tuessig, and how he stole part of your father's design of his great invention. Tom, I wager the one hope in your heart is that fortune will send you across his path some day or other, when you can perhaps recover the lost paper, or at least repay him for his treachery."

"You've guessed it, Jack! I'd give anything to have just such a chance. Father is beginning to despair of ever getting his invention completed, with that part of his plans lost. He seems to be unable to remember just how the exact combination was to be effected; and the more he worries the deeper his confusion grows. Mother is quite anxious about him on that account."

"Stranger things than such a meeting have happened, Tom. Let's hope that just such a chance may come your way before that Tuessig is able to hand over his find to the German headquarters in the Wilhelmstrasse."

"Strange to say," mused Tom, "the detective my father employed has been unable to find a

single trace of Tuessig. He seems to have disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him up. Men have been kept watching the German Legation at Washington right along, because the ambassador is getting into pretty deep water, and is apt to receive his walking papers any day; but Tuessig hasn't been there."

"Then," said the hopeful Jack, "perhaps he doesn't feel satisfied to hand in only an incomplete prize. He may be holding on in the hope of yet being able to steal the rest of your father's secret."

Jack soon took his departure. He hardly knew whether he felt joyous or depressed over the near approach of the day when he was to start for New York, there to board a trans-Atlantic steamer bound for the warring country beyond the sea. There were times when Jack's heart beat high with delightful anticipations; and then again the sight of his widowed mother's pale face, with its forced smile whenever she thought he was looking, gave him a severe pang.

Tom spent a quiet evening with his family. His father and mother, as well as Oscar, a lad of twelve, and Phoebe, a six-year old sister, hovered over him constantly, and the talk was as cheerful as could be expected under the conditions.

Finally Tom kissed his mother good-night and

went to his room. He was gulping down the emotions that struggled in his heart, for it is indeed no light thing for a boy to part from all he loves and go forth to risk his life in the service of mankind.

The boy found it hard to lose himself in sleep. His thoughts roved far afield as he endeavored to lift the curtain of the future and catch faint glimpses of the wonderful things that might be lying in store for him in the land across the sea, where the hand of war had been laid so heavily.

At last he sank into an uneasy slumber. Just what time it was when he suddenly awoke Tom would have found it difficult to say had he been asked. He heard all manner of queer sounds welling up to his partly-opened window from the yard. There were loud and explosive ejaculations in a masculine voice, fierce yappings from the dog, Duke, and then certain suspicious crashing noises as though some person might be striving to clamber hastily over the high fence that ran around the Raymond premises.

Tom leaped to his feet and hurriedly slipped into some of his clothes, though in his excitement he could hardly manage his dressing, even after he had turned on the electric light. Having accomplished this after a fashion, he picked up a baseball bat as the best weapon of defense

within reach, and then hurried down to the front door.

His father called to him as he descended the stairs.

"Be careful of the dog, Tom! He's back in the yard and growling furiously. Speak to him as you go out. I'll join you shortly. I believe he must have the thief cornered somewhere."

That gave Tom a pleasant thrill, for he fully believed the man must be the same bold intruder who had stolen the paper from the safe on that former occasion. He had undoubtedly returned in hopes of securing another prize, and thus completing the object of his previous visit.

Swinging his baseball bat as he ran, Tom hastened around the house. The moon was hidden from view behind clouds, but for all that it was not dark, and Tom could see some object moving over in one corner of the back yard.

A rather high fence surrounded Mr. Raymond's property. Near the top of this Tom made out a struggling figure that he took to be a man. As he dashed forward and drew closer he discovered what it all meant.

The thief on being attacked by the bulldog had attempted to climb over the fence. Before he could draw himself wholly out of reach the animal had made an upward leap, and fastened those terrible teeth of his in the seat of the fellow's trousers as he hung suspended there.

Duke was swinging back and forth like an animated pendulum, growling most ferociously. The alarmed man continued to strain every muscle while striving to drag himself up, but with that added weight holding him back he had until that moment been unable to accomplish this task.

On hearing Tom shout out to the dog however, a new spasm of alarm caused the thief to struggle still more strenuously. Then the cloth of his trousers gave way, and suddenly the dog fell back to the ground, while the man, with great alacrity, slipped over the top of the high board fence.

The animal commenced to race about shaking the fragment of cloth he still held between his teeth. Tom made for the back gate, threw the bar aside, and ran out. He heard his father calling to him to be careful, but so long as he gripped such a good weapon as that heavy ash bat he had no fear of the result, should he be fortunate enough to overtake the thief.

The dog came rushing after him, and Tom gave the animal an encouraging word. But after all he was doomed to disappointment, for the man had obtained a start of half a minute at least, which was long enough for his purpose.

When Tom heard the familiar throb of a motor working near by he realized that the

intruder had come prepared for hasty flight in case of discovery. Then a car sped away with a great roaring of the unmuffled engine.

Keenly disappointed, and yet pleased to know that the would-be robbery had not occurred, Tom retraced his steps. His father met him just inside the grounds.

"Then he got away clean and clear, did he?" asked the gentleman, who of course guessed the state of affairs when he first heard the sound of a speeding car.

"I don't know about clean and clear, Dad," Tom told him. "Come here, Duke, and let's see what you're shaking so savagely."

It was only with some difficulty that Tom persuaded the bulldog to let him have the article. He held this up and then laughed.

"Why, it's pretty nearly the entire seat of a pair of trousers, father," he explained. "The dog was hanging to him like the pendulum of a grandfather clock, and fighting like everything to drag him down. But the cloth gave finally, which allowed the scamp to tumble over the fence and get away."

Mr. Raymond took the spoils of Duke's attack and examined it under the glare of a little hand-electric torch he was carrying with him.

"The teeth of the dog drew blood, as you can see, my boy," he remarked, holding the article

out to Tom. "I should say that rascal will have a most decided limp to his gait for some days to come."

"Then everywhere I go I'll keep on the lookout for any man who walks with a cane, and limps as though each step caused him pain," suggested Tom, perhaps in a semi-humorous mood, though he hardly felt as though the subject was one to be treated lightly.

"Perhaps I had better send this fragment of cloth to the detective who's looking for Adolph Tuessig," continued Mr. Raymond reflectively. "It might afford him an excellent clue, in case he manages to find the German secret agent of the Kaiser."

"You seem to feel absolutely certain, Father, that this man must have been the same thief who visited the house before."

"There is no question about it in my mind, Son," returned the other firmly. "He has realized that what he managed to secure is only a fragment of the whole; and so he either came back himself, or else sent an accomplice, to try to find the rest of the papers containing my secret invention."

As the air was cold, and neither of them had fully dressed, the two spent no more time in the open, saying a last word of commendation to the dog, and then retiring indoors.

In the morning Tom investigated, and could easily see where the would-be thief had scrambled so hastily over the fence; for footprints led to the spot, and by looking closely he could even detect tiny specks of a suggestive red stain on the boards, that told the tragic story.

When Jack came he showed a tremendous amount of interest in the story, and had to be taken over the whole ground, as well as pet Duke and compliment him on his staying qualities. To all of this praise the bulldog seemed to listen with more or less appreciation, if the jerking of his abbreviated tail could be accepted as evidence.

That day would see them off. The minutes dragged in a way, because both boys were becoming very nervous over the parting scenes, which they dreaded a little. But it was over at last, and they boarded the afternoon train bound for New York.

When they arrived in the great metropolis the afternoon was well on toward its close. Indeed, already the shades of evening had begun to gather as they took a taxicab and with their steamer trunks rode down to the dock from which their vessel was to leave at some indefinite time, perhaps before sunrise on the morrow.

As they arrived at the great bustling dock it was to find that electric lights blazed and steve-

dores were hustling to finish loading the vessel to the limit, while intending passengers were dodging the rushing trucks or entering through the passenger entrance or hurrying over the gangplank.

It was a scene of considerable commotion on which the two comrades gazed as they paid their driver, and then saw to it that their steamer trunks, bags and smaller packages were started for their stateroom. Then they hurried to board the gray monster that lay alongside the dock almost ready to start for the danger-zone, where waiting German undersea vessels lurked, watching for their prey like tigers in the jungle hungry for a meal.

It was just at this moment that Tom caught his companion's arm in a tense grip, while he hissed in his ear:

"Look at that taxi driving wildly away, will you, Jack? A man thrust his head out, and stared right at us just before the chauffeur started off so furiously. And Jack, I recognized his face! My father had a photograph of Adolph Tuessig which the detective obtained for him somehow or other. Yes, that man in the taxi was the slippery German who robbed my father! And he must know who we are, as well as why we're starting across to France!"

CHAPTER V

THE SECRET SAILING

JACK showed signs of excitement when his comrade made such a startling announcement. He stared after the departing taxicab and acted as though more than half inclined to dash away in pursuit.

"Oh, what a shame that we have to let him get away in that fashion, Tom!" he exclaimed in a disappointed tone. "Where can that detective be hanging out, not to be able to find the German spy? If only we could have him nabbed, perhaps we might be able to recover that paper."

"It was out of the question, you see, Jack," the other told him sadly. "There, the taxi has disappeared now in the ruck of vehicles, all trying to get in and out of the pier here, where everything is being rushed like fury. But even if I had Adolph Tuessig arrested, what charge could I make against him, when we haven't a shred of real proof that he was the one who entered our house?"

"I guess you're right there, Tom," admitted

the other dejectedly. "I'm always ready to do things on impulse, but you have a reason back of you every time you act. He's gone for good now, anyhow, so nothing can be done. But it roiles me to think of our seeing him just when — Oh, Tom!"

"What's struck you now?" demanded the other, seeing Jack's face lighten up all of a sudden.

"Why should Adolph Tuessig be coming down to this steamer if he hadn't meant to go aboard?" continued Jack, again showing excitement. "Seeing us frightened him off, apparently, but then he may come back again later, and sneak aboard."

Tom looked serious, as though digesting the suggestion advanced by his chum.

"Well, there might be some truth in that idea, Jack," he finally remarked.

The two youths went aboard the steamer. The passengers were looking rather subdued, and while there were affecting leave-takings, little of the customary merriment connected with these sailings for Europe was manifested.

The reason was not difficult to understand, for even the neutral gray color of the once jet black steamship told of perils of the sea entirely foreign to such ordinary things as gales and floating icebergs. Vessels went into that

barred zone with the nerves of those aboard keyed up to a tense pitch and sleep was a stranger to their eyes for perhaps two whole nights of terror and anxiety.

The boys meant to stand watch until the steamer left her dock, some time toward the middle of the night. They wished to discover whether Adolph Tuessig really came aboard and if they were fated to have him as a fellow passenger on their voyage across.

"In one sense it would be a good thing for us," Tom remarked, as they stood by the rail and watched the bustling scenes going on below, where the dock was crowded by a jostling throng of stevedores, porters hurrying baggage aboard, passengers still arriving, friends leaving sorrowfully, some of them weeping as though heartbroken.

"Tell me what you mean," demanded his companion.

"Well, if Tuessig had picked on this vessel on which to cross, we might count it as a sort of insurance that nothing unusual was going to happen to us. If he is, as we strongly suspect, a secret agent of the German Government, he would be apt to know just what special steamers the subs were ordered to try to catch napping. Perhaps this one isn't loaded with the munitions they aim to sink whenever they can."

"But I'm afraid we'll never be able to keep watch here for hours, Tom. Already I'm beginning to shiver like everything, on account of that chilly wind coming down the Hudson River. And besides, it's about time dinner was announced; for we were told we'd get that meal aboard."

Just as they were about to turn away and seek the warm saloon Jack pointed to a large and handsome motor car that had managed to force its way through the tangle of vehicles and rolling trucks, and from which some people, evidently intending passengers, were alighting.

"As pretty a young girl as ever you set eyes on, Tom," he hastened to say. for Jack was much fonder of girls' society than his chum had ever shown himself to be. "I hope we shall get to know her before the voyage is over. Just take a peep and tell me if she hasn't got other girls beaten a mile for good looks."

To please his chum Tom did glance that way. He saw a diminutive girl who could hardly have been more than twelve years of age, and scarcely looked even that; but she was remarkably attractive, so far as rosy cheeks, dancing eyes, and a wealth of golden hair went. In spite of her apparent lack of years, there was a grown-up air about her that some girl babies seem born with and that makes friends for them among older people from the start.

"Yes, she is as pretty as a peach, for a fact," Jack's chum admitted. "I suppose I'll see little of your company if ever you get to be on speaking terms with such a fairy. But there goes the call to dinner," he added as a steward was seen hurrying to a number of the passengers bending over the rail and watching the busy scene below, to say something to each in turn, and point toward the companionway leading to the dining saloon.

Later on, before the boys were through eating dinner, they discovered the girl again. She was given a seat at the same table as the boys, and Jack could consequently feast his eyes on her pretty face to his heart's content.

There was a man with her, who may have been her father, though Tom made up his mind that there could be very little real affection between the two, for the girl acted as though she secretly feared her guardian, while on his part the man with the snappy eyes and rather cynical cast of features frowned often when speaking to his young companion.

Somehow Tom was himself becoming mightily interested in the girl, a fact which would be apt to surprise Jack when he learned it. He wondered what the relationship between man and girl could be, and why they were taking these desperate chances to cross to the other side at

a time when no one dreamed of making a pleasure voyage.

Again the two chums sought the outer air. It was even more disagreeable than earlier in the evening, and they could not stay very long. A raw wind whistled down the broad North River, as the Hudson is called at New York City, and seemed to bring with it reminders of fields of ice that were still lingering far up toward the border of the Catskills.

"We'd better give it up as a bad job," suggested Tom after awhile, "and keep in where it's warm. Either he's safe aboard by this time, or else he doesn't mean to sail on this boat, now that he knows we're going."

"Yes," admitted even the sanguine Jack, "he may take a notion we'll give him away to the British authorities, and cause his arrest as a German spy. Though I've no doubt he's clever enough to have a false passport that describes him as a Swede, or perhaps a Swiss going home to do his bit in guarding the Alpine frontier against the Huns. But we can keep our eyes open all the time, Tom, while we're aboard."

When the other passengers learned the nature of their mission many of them expressed the most intense interest in the two chums. More than one mature man declared he stood ready to take off his hat to such brave lads, and wished them all manner of good luck.

They sat up until a late hour, and were thrilled when it was learned that the vessel was even then being towed out from her berth into mid-stream by a fleet of powerful tugs. Even these usually noisy little monsters seemed to have their mufflers on, for they accomplished their work with but a fraction of the customary whistling and puffing and snorting.

The boys bundled up and went on deck to watch what took place. Leaving an American port during wartime was an entirely different thing from what it had been in other days. Silence and mystery had taken the place of whistle-blowing and music and loud salvos of cheers. Now the spectators stood and strained their eyes for a last look at those friends aboard the departing steamship, whom possibly they were fated never to see again in this world.

Tom and Jack stood on deck and looked back toward the overhead light that marked the torch in the hand of the Statue of Liberty. Long they stayed and paced the deck when chilled by the night air. Now and then they turned to look back to where the great city slept, secure, by reason of the vast ocean's width, from aerial bombardments and guarded against attacks from hostile battleships by the eternal vigilance of the Allied fleet by which the Germans were bottled up in their home waters at Kiel.

Ahead of them lay the broad Atlantic. They were now headed for the danger zone. Presently they would come to that sector which the German high command had marked as the cruising ground for their insatiable submarine rovers. Behind each and every rolling billow might lie a concealed peril, but the hearts of those two chums felt no fear as they looked forward with confidence to the work to which they had dedicated their lives.

CHAPTER VI

NEARING THE BARRED ZONE

Some days passed.

The big steamer, headed toward her goal, which was a harbor in the south of England, kept pushing through the vast expanse of water. The boys would have preferred sailing on a French vessel, but at the time could secure no booking.

As Jack had said, "half a loaf is better than no bread;" and once across the Atlantic they would not have a great deal of trouble jumping over to France, since the Channel was so narrow that on clear days one could see the white chalk cliffs of Dover from the other side.

Nothing out of the way had happened so far on the voyage, but every one knew the critical days and nights were yet to come. The boys had made numerous acquaintances aboard, but, acting on the advice of Lieutenant Carson, they had spoken of their own affairs as little as possible.

Like many others of the passengers, they amused themselves at odd times in playing deck quoits and shuffleboard. There was enough of interest in both games to engage their attention, though Jack declared them "effeminate," having been immersed in the national game of baseball, and even a promising player on the high-school football squad at the time he graduated.

Still, some such employment helped to pass the dull hours away. It also took the minds of the travelers away from the terrible perils to which each hour carried them nearer. And how many times, even while thus engaged, and in an apparently boisterous humor, those aboard would look anxiously toward the beckoning east.

Somewhere in that region, as they well knew, lurked those terrible undersea boats manned by German crews on the constant watch to sink any laden steamer that crossed their path. And this knowledge never left them, night or day. While awake it haunted their minds and took up much of their conversation; when asleep there came dreams that caused them to open their eyes in sudden fear, and then be very thankful that it was not yet a reality.

Jack had easily succeeded in making the acquaintance of the young girl who had attracted his attention at the time of the embarkation.

In fact, he found her not in the least averse to talking to him when the first opportunity arose. Jack plumed himself on this circumstance at the time, and fancied that it was because he had an attractive air about him. Later on these aircastles crumbled into ruins and dreadful suspicions arose.

He often played deck quoits with Bessie Gleason, as Jack learned her name was. She was mature in her ways, and yet full of fun. Jack liked her more as he came to know her; and yet in spite of this he admitted to Tom that there was something a bit queer about the girl which he could not quite fathom.

He was talking of her that afternoon when, with his chum, he sat in an exposed part of the promenade deck taking a sun-bath. The day was pleasant, and there was just enough warmth in the sun's rays to make it delightful to loll there.

The sea was fairly rough, and the billows had their foamy crests whipped off as with a knife when breaking in the wind, to be carried away in the shape of spume or spray. The favorite occupation of most of the travelers just then was to sit and look across the heaving waters, their anxious eyes searching for any object that by a stretch of the imagination could be transformed into the periscope of a

submersible waiting to shoot a torpedo at the unprotected side of the steamer.

"I never had any girl puzzle me as much as Bessie Gleason does, and that's a fact, Tom," Jack remarked thoughtfully.

"What do you mean by that remark?" demanded the other, looking at him with sudden interest.

"Why, she changes all of a sudden from a fit of merriment, and becomes as sober as an old maid," explained Jack, as though he had been meditating over the matter for some time and could not reach any satisfactory explanation.

"Oh, that isn't so queer after all," chuckled Tom. "There are plenty aboard this boat who are afflicted with sudden losses of memory. I've had men talking to me lose the connection of what they were saying; and when I looked up it was to find them shading their eyes with a hand and staring hard ahead over the bows of the steamer, as if they felt a horrible suspicion that there was something like a stick standing up out of the water."

And then there's that man who she says is her legally-appointed guardian," continued Jack, shaking his head in bewilderment. "I confess I don't like him a little bit!"

"But you haven't even spoken with him, you told me yesterday," ventured Tom.

"That's true enough," the other admitted. "But I've watched him when he thought I was dozing in my chair, and, Tom, he's keeping a precious close eye on you, I want to say."

"And why on me?" demanded Tom, looking surprised and interested. "Until this morning, when Bessie came up to me while I was looking over the rail and started to talk about our going across to France, I hadn't really exchanged a dozen sentences with the girl. Huh! if anybody should be watched I rather think his name might be Jack Parmly!"

"I don't know why he should seem so much interested in you," continued the other, "but it's a fact. Why, Tom, I chanced to see him speak to the girl just before she joined you this morning, and I give you my word it struck me the man was scolding Bessie, as if she had refused to do something he wanted of her. And then, with a look on her face that was close to reluctance, she walked over to where you stood, and spoke to you."

"Do you mean to say you believe Mr. Potzfeldt seemed to force his ward to enter into conversation with me, and perhaps get me to talking about our mission in France?" he exclaimed.

"Please don't speak quite so loud, Tom," urged his chum. "I give you my word that's

just the way it did strike me. Queer, wasn't it, now? Why under the sun should he want her to cultivate your acquaintance particularly?"

"Who is this guardian of Bessie Gleason?" asked Tom. "His name is a German one, but one gentleman I talked with assured me he was a naturalized American and carried his papers around with him, so that he might not be debarred from landing in England."

"Yes," added Jack, anxious to add his mite to the slender mass of information they had been able to accumulate, "and another man told me Carl Potzfeldt fairly bubbles over with enthusiasm for the glorious Stars and Stripes. He says he looks on Germany as a nation gone mad, and agrees that sooner or later Uncle Sam will have to shy his hat into the ring to help hog-tie the wild beast."

"All of which sounds very fine," agreed Tom, with a curl to his lip. "But in these days who can know what the real sentiments deep down in the heart of such a man may be? A spy would naturally be loud in his talk of loyalty to the flag, in order to hide his genuine sympathies."

"Another thing you ought to know, Tom," continued the other, "though up to now I haven't mentioned it to you. Bessie Gleason asked me to introduce her to you. Yes, and she acted, well, peculiar when saying that she'd like to

meet you. She's a knowing one for her years, and at the time I thought it was only the coquetry of the girl playing shy and bold; but now I've got another idea gripping me."

"Go on and tell me what you think, because all this is getting mighty interesting to me," urged Tom.

"I feel almost certain she made that request at the command of her guardian, Carl Potzfeldt," announced Jack sturdily. "Now I think her manner was one of embarrassment, as though she felt ashamed of playing a mean part but was compelled to do as she was told."

Tom frowned. From his serious manner it was plain to be seen that he attached considerable importance to the astonishing thing his companion was telling him.

"If what you suspect is really a fact, Jack," he remarked soberly, "there's only one explanation for it that I can see."

"You believe this Carl Potzfeldt may have some invisible connection with that Adolph Tuessig, the chap we suspect of being aboard this very steamer, hiding under some false name —or another name, for Adolph Tuessig may be an alias—and keeping to his stateroom during the day. Is that it, Tom?"

"Just what I had in mind, Jack. You know we've done our best to find out if that German

spy is aboard this ship, and have tried to run down information about that man whose name has not been entered on the passenger list, and who came aboard late just before we sailed."

"Yes," hastily added the other musingly, "and the steward we interviewed, who carries the sick man's meals in to him, says he has the appetite of a horse; so we kind of suspect his keeping to his stateroom may be a blind after all. Once late in the night, you remember, you ran into a stranger who was muffled to the eyes, and who hurried away when you begged his pardon. Ever since you've been wondering if he was the sick man, and who might yet turn out to be that slick German spy, masquerading as a Swede; or a Swiss perhaps."

"Altogether it's getting to be a pretty mixed-up mess I must say," Tom continued. "If we have a pair of them aboard this boat, plotting to do something or other, it'll pay us to keep our eyes open wider than ever, Jack!"

CHAPTER VII

SECRET ENEMIES ABOARD

"ONE thing sure," Jack went on to say positively: "That girl is a true-blue Ally. She told me so, and you couldn't look in her eyes and believe she could deceive. If she's acting a part at all, under orders, Tom, take it from me she hates her job like everything."

Tom seemed inclined to agree with his chum, though he had seen very little of Bessie Gleason.

"Well, when she quizzed me, you know, Tom, about my being afraid when up in the clouds, of course I felt that I had to explain that so far I hadn't felt a grain of fear, only delight, when spinning along at eighty miles an hour in an airplane. Yes, I told her a few things about what we hoped to do. But then anybody who knows we're bound for a French aviation school could understand all that."

Jack evinced a sudden inclination to leave the company of his chum.

"Excuse me now, will you, Tom?" he observed, with a smirk; "but I'm going on the hurricane-deck to have a little promenade with Bessie. She

asked me to meet her up there around two this afternoon; in fact slipped me a little note when leaving the dining-saloon this noon. I rather think she has got something special she wants to say to me. And, Tom, if it's of any importance, mind, I'll let you know about it."

"Wish you would," the other flashed after him as he hastened away; and from the sober expression on his face it could be seen that Tom felt an interest much deeper than mere passing curiosity in the matter.

Some time afterwards he was sitting in his deck chair, warmly wrapped in his Scotch plaid steamer rug when he saw Jack hurriedly approaching. Tom understood that his chum must have some news worth while to tell him, if the look on his face counted for anything.

Before throwing himself down in his own chair, Jack looked cautiously in both directions. It chanced that there were few passengers abroad just then. A bundled-up figure dozed in a chair at some little distance forward; and further aft a woman who was going over as a Red Cross nurse at the front, was sitting reading a magazine.

"I imagine you've struck something worth while, old fellow," suggested Tom.

"Well, I have," was the reply, in a comparatively low tone. "Tom, after all I guess our suspicions were pretty near the mark."

"About Carl Potzfeldt do you mean?" demanded Tom instantly.

"He knows about your father and his invention that threatens to revolutionize aerial warfare and give the side possessing it a vast advantage in the war," Jack hastened to say breathlessly.

"Well, I'm not much surprised. I seemed to feel he was German at heart, even if he does wear a little flag emblem in his buttonhole and is continually boasting of his loyalty. Did Bessie tell you this, Jack?"

"She did. The poor little thing wilted and cried when she confessed that her guardian had made her try to learn all about us—what we were going over to France for, and even if we expected to make some sort of bargain that would mean a fortune for your father."

Tom ground his teeth in sudden rage.

"Just like some of those mercenary Germans!" he muttered. "They can think only of bargain and sale. Even now they firmly believe my father means to get the biggest price he can from some Government. They think Adolph Tuessig made a blunder in not bidding high enough for the secret of the stabilizer."

"And that you are being sent across to France with the design of the invention hidden in your luggage, so as to make a bargain with the

Allies for handing it over to them. I guess they don't know the patriotism of your father, Tom."

"I should say not!" and Tom's face took on a tender expression.

"It was terrible to see that poor girl crying as she tried to tell me how she hated to do as her guardian forced her," Jack continued, with a look of concern on his young face that spoke well for his sympathetic heart.

"Then that was why she wanted to see you, was it?" asked Tom, "and why she slipped you that note at dinner-time?"

"Just what it is was. She said Mr. Potzfeldt had ordered her to keep trying to find out all about our mission to France. More than that, she was to manage in some way to turn the conversation when with you around to your father, whose name as an inventor is widely known. She was to ask questions about his work, and in every way possible try to discover whether it was in his interests you were not really heading for France."

Tom was startled.

"Well, one thing good about it," he hastened to say. "From now on we know where this Carl Potzfeldt stands. He may pose as a loyal American citizen, but deep down in his heart he is for the Kaiser. Whether he is a

spy, as that Adolph Tuessig surely is, we can't be positive; but I wouldn't trust him a minute."

"Tom, the girl was almost broken hearted. She isn't the kind to fancy playing a double part, and deceiving other people. Any one must see her eyes are as frank and truthful as can be."

"Did she tell you anything about her guardian, Jack—whether he might really be a naturalized citizen of Uncle Sam, or just sailing under false colors and a borrowed passport?"

"I wanted to ask her that, but say, I didn't have the nerve, she seemed to feel so unhappy. Then, as if she couldn't stand it any longer, she rushed away from me and descended to the other deck. When I followed she had disappeared from view, and I suppose had sought refuge in her stateroom, for she has one, you know, shared by that Red Cross nurse over yonder."

"Now, I've got something to tell you that may be of interest," remarked Tom, in turn. "You remember that we marked the stateroom occupied by that mysterious sick passenger who has never come on deck in the daytime since boarding the boat?"

"Yes," Jack instantly snapped, "it was Number Seventy-seven, for I made a mental note of it. And a dozen times I've passed out of my

way just to stare at the closed door, thinking how much I'd like to see what lay on the other side, and if that man could really be your Adolph Tuessig."

"Well, a little while ago, after you left me to go up and walk the hurricane-deck with Bessie Gleason, I had occasion to go to our stateroom for my binoculars, and who should I see coming out of Number Seventy-seven but Potzfeldt!"

Jack uttered an exclamation of mingled surprise and delight.

"Good for you!" he ejaculated. "That settles it, I should say! The pretended sick man is Adolph Tuessig all right; and he's in thick with this boastful naturalized American citizen who wears Old Glory in his buttonhole and tells how much he wishes he were a younger man so he could enlist under Uncle Sam. It makes me sick!"

"As they say in the story books, the plot thickens," Tom continued. "Somehow or other Adolph doesn't seem to take much stock in our crossing over to fly for the country we in America admire above all others just now. He thinks all Yankees must be mercenary, and that I'm carrying the completed design of father's wonderful invention with me, to sell it for a vast sum to the Allies."

"Tom, after this you've got to be more careful than ever how you hang over the side of the boat when dark sets in," cautioned Jack. "It would be easy enough for a strong and desperate man to throttle you, search your person, and then chuck you overboard. Such men who could remorselessly sink women and babies aboard the *Lusitania* wouldn't hesitate about sacrificing one single life in the interest of the Fatherland."

"Oh, come, let's quit this sort of talk for a while, Jack. It's beginning to wear on our minds too much. We'll exercise all reasonable caution, and they'll find it a tough job to catch either of us napping. I challenge you to a game of deck quoits. That ought to keep us busy for an hour or so."

Jack, nothing loth, laughingly accepted the bantering offer, and so they were soon tossing the covered rings back and forth in the endeavor to drop them one after another over the stake that represented the goal. It was not a very exciting amusement, but sufficed to divert their minds and keep them from worrying about the things they wished to forget temporarily.

When the hour was up Jack declared he had had quite enough, and was so far behind that there seemed no possible chance for him to catch up that time.

"I'll give you another turn to-morrow," he told Tom. "That is, if everything goes on well and we haven't run afoul of one of those slinkers with the torpedo tubes that are waiting for us to cross their path. I'll step down to our room and get a fresh handkerchief. You see I insisted on Bessie taking my other to dry her tears with, and, well, she carried it away when she left me so suddenly."

Jack walked away and Tom again sought his chair, and lay back to glance across the heaving waters once more, although not in the expectation of making a discovery.

The afternoon was almost done. With the approach of night it was commencing to get chilly again, so that the youth was glad to tuck his steamer rug about his legs as he reclined at his ease.

A few persons had commenced to walk briskly up and down the full length of the promenade deck. This was the customary prelude to a meal, for they were taking exercise in order to stir up a sharper appetite. Even the ship's doctor had a woman patient in tow, and was making her almost run along by him, chatting at the same time to divert her mind.

Tom saw his chum advancing toward him again. As before Jack looked bothered, so that the other immediately became interested. Re-

membering what Jack had told him with reference to Bessie Gleason, he wondered whether his comrade could have met the girl again by accident. This might have happened on the companionway or down in one of the passages leading to the various staterooms. And perhaps Jack had heard further particulars concerning her plotting guardian's desire that she should coax the boys into confiding their secret to her ears.

Jack dropped down into his seat with a grunt, after that cautious look around which had become a part of his nature lately. Then Tom heard him say grumblingly:

"After all they were too smart for us, Tom, for they've been searching your luggage while we played like a couple of sillies at deck quoits!"

CHAPTER VIII

PERILS WITHIN AND WITHOUT

Tom did not seem to be very much astonished when his chum made that statement.

"Well, do you know, I rather half expected that was what you were going to tell me," he observed coolly. "I wondered whether such a smart chap as Adolph Tuessig, if he is aboard this steamer, would let a chance get past him to have my trunk broken open and looked over. That was what happened, was it, Jack?"

"While one fellow watched us another must have been busy in our stateroom," explained the discoverer of the latest outrage. "These rascals seem to incline toward the burglary business, all right."

"Why not, when spying is always associated with thievery?" Tom told him plainly enough. "Did they do much damage? I purposely left the trunk unlocked so as to save them from smashing it."

"Oh! did you?" exclaimed his chum, elevating his eyebrows. "Then I warrant you they found nothing for their pains."

"How could they, when as you know I am not carrying a message to the French Government in connection with my father's invention? Neither have I a design of the new airplane stabilizer in my possession, no matter what they believe. Tell me what you found once you stepped inside the stateroom."

"Oh, it is a sight to behold, Tom, with all your traps thrown around every which way for Sunday! They even ripped the lining of your steamer trunk in several places, trying to learn whether you could have hidden a paper under that. The fellow had to work like lightning, I guess, and couldn't afford to be particular. You'll certainly have to get that trunk fixed, once we land."

"I think I'd better go back with you and take a look," and Tom got to his feet. "Of course we can do nothing about it, because like as not no one saw the sneak thief enter or leave our room, and we couldn't very well accuse Potzfeldt of robbery on general principles."

"It makes me furious to know how our hands are tied," grumbled Jack; "because I hate a sneak like a skunk, and would like to see both of those fellows taken in hand by the British when we land. But I suppose they've fixed things so they'll be decently treated as friendly to the cause."

When shortly afterwards Tom entered their stateroom he looked around with no little concern, as well as secret amusement. Knowing that he had practically nothing to fear from thievery, he could afford to allow himself to be amused.

"Well, I should say that chap did toss my duds about with a vengeance," he told Jack, who followed him inside, and then hastily closed and fastened the door after him. "It looks as if a cyclone had struck my trunk and scattered every thing right and left regardless."

"Look and see if they took anything," Jack advised.

So the owner of the stuff proceeded to replace it once more in the small trunk that could be accommodated under one end of the lower berth, Jack's belongings in a similar receptacle taking up the remainder of the space.

"Everything seems to be accounted for," announced Tom, when he had gathered up all the clothing and such things as he carried with him to be used in his work as an aviator.

"That proves one thing," snapped Jack; "It wasn't any ordinary thief who entered this stateroom while we were on deck and searched your trunk. He was looking for something besides money or valuables. Say, he must have been pretty mad when he found he'd had all

his work for nothing, and given his business away in the bargain, for of course he understood that you'd guess what it all meant."

"It strikes me," mused Tom, sitting on the lower berth, and turning toward his indignant chum, "that we're having all sorts of thrills aboard this steamer long before we get to the danger zone and the waiting subs."

"A little bit too much excitement to please me. The trouble is it's all on one side. So far we haven't been able to get a single whack at those clever scamps."

Tom was taking it very much in the light of a joke. He at least was not worrying himself because the plotters had met with such a bitter disappointment when they may have anticipated great things to come of this secret search.

"Do you think they'll be ready to give it up as a bad job, now that they've looked your trunk over, and failed to find anything?" Jack went on to ask.

"That's hard to say. They may take a notion to scatter your trunk around for a change."

"But why should they do that?" demanded Jack.

"On general principles, and because, don't you see, I might have been shrewd enough to hand the paper over for you to hide away in

your trunk. Then again, if they had the nerve and could manage it, they might try to chloroform us some fine night as we slept, and search our clothes, even ripping open the fleece linings of our leather aviation coats in the hope of finding something worth while."

Of course Tom spoke half in a joking mood, but his chum took it all seriously enough. Unaccustomed to dealing with clever rogues, Jack was beginning to imagine all manner of terrible possibilities as hanging over the heads of his companion and himself.

"Say, we really ought to complain to the captain, and have this thing stopped," he burst out. "If he knew what was going on aboard his old boat he'd gladly put a man on duty day and night to watch our stateroom."

"But we ought to be able to look out for ourselves, it strikes me, Jack. Since we have no paper to be taken away from us, why should we worry? They'll give it up as a bad job presently. Besides, we're only two nights and a day out from port now, and there'll be plenty to engage our attention from now on, without borrowing trouble."

"Well, I'm going to leave my trunk unlocked, after this, so as to save them the trouble of smashing it if they should come in here again," Jack remarked sagaciously, tak-

ing a pointer from what his chum had told him.

Later on, when at the table, they found that the company seemed unusually quiet. Seldom was a laugh heard, and serious faces were the rule rather than the exception. Though those aboard might be reckoned brave men and women, or they would not have been there, the near approach to a dreaded peril was beginning to get on their nerves.

Tom decided to lounge in the cabin after the meal, and for a time Jack was willing to stay there also. But he seemed very restless, and was up and down many times inside of the next hour.

"I think I'll go outside, and take a few turns," he finally told Tom. "I feel stupid after eating so much supper, and a bracing air would serve as a tonic. See you later, Tom."

"Well, don't forget what we were talking about," the other warned him. "It's as dark as a pocket out there, because they won't allow lights, you know, and after all, the stars don't count for much. Keep away from the rail, Jack!"

"I will," the other assured him as he turned away.

After that Tom continued to keep his attention fixed to some extent on the story he was

reading. Now and then he looked around, and noted that the passengers seemed loth to retire to their several quarters. They clustered in little groups in the saloon, where the lights burned dimly and the openings were duly covered with cloth, so as to prevent any escape of the scanty illumination.

Any one could easily see that their subdued spirits indicated a pervading fear lest at any minute they should hear loud excited cries, to be quickly followed by a frightful explosion that would tear a great hole in some part of the big steamer and let the sea rush in with greedy force.

Jack had been gone some little while and Tom looked for him to come inside again. In fact, he should really have done so already, his chum felt, unless he had by chance met some entertaining person outside, who had interested him so that the passage of time had been unnoticed.

Tom found himself wondering whether Bessie Gleason could have gone outside. He had noticed her looking suggestively toward Jack while at the table every time her gloomy-faced guardian turned away to speak to the neighbor on his left. Tom somehow conceived the impression that the girl wanted to see Jack again in private. Perhaps she had something fur-

ther to communicate, some fresh warning to give Jack; and if she could slip away from Mr. Potzfeldt and pass out to the promenade deck in order to join Jack there—

He had just reached this point in his thoughts when he saw the girl. She had apparently just come from her stateroom, for she was in company with the Red Cross nurse. There was a half-frightened expression on Bessie's pretty face. Still, who could wonder at such a thing, when people many times her age were looking peaked and white in those critical hours.

The girl was looking in Tom's direction now. He saw her make an involuntary gesture as if gripped by some emotion. Then she started forward—she was heading straight toward the spot where the youth sat, as though bent on speaking to him.

Tom put his magazine down. After all, the story he chanced to be reading was not one half as exciting as the conditions by which he found himself surrounded at that very moment.

"Oh, where is Jack?" asked the girl, as soon as she reached his side. "I hope he has not gone out on that gloomy deck to walk!"

"Just what he did some little time ago," Tom told her, at the same time feeling a sense of coming peril gripping his heart and thrilling his pulses. "But why do you look so anxious, Bessie?"

"Oh, I hardly know! I heard so little of what they were saying, because they talked so low!" she told him, her eyes round with newly-awakened fears. "But don't you see, they might mistake Jack in the dark for you?"

"Do you mean you have a suspicion some one intends to knock me down, if it can be done in the gloom of the night, Bessie?" he asked her.

"Yes, I am afraid it means just that! But please let us go and find Jack!" she begged, in a low, thrilling tone.

Of course Tom needed no urging. His heart was beating tumultuously as he left his chair and, followed by the eager girl, passed from the dim cabin to the utter darkness of the promenade deck. He was almost afraid of what he might find there.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT HAPPENED TO JACK

ALTHOUGH the cabin had seemed but poorly lighted, the contrast to the darkness of the promenade deck was very pronounced. Clouds covered the sky, and so what light might have come from that source was shut off to a great extent. Then, too, the shadow cast by the overhanging hurricane-deck above added to the general gloom.

At random, Tom started forward. It seemed as though the chances of coming upon his comrade would be stronger if he took that direction. People were more apt to saunter toward the stern of the boat; and besides, the crew of the quick-firing three-inch gun usually gathered there, close to their "pet," which was covered at times with a tarpaulin, though ever ready for instant use in emergency.

The agitated girl kept at his side. Tom never once doubted the genuine nature of Bessie Gleason's emotion. She had hugged her fears to her heart until they could no longer be endured in solitude, and had then

insisted on coming up from below, in company with the kind Red Cross nurse, to find her new friends and warn them of the impending peril.

The pair were soon well up forward, at least as far as the promenade deck was now open to the passengers. In ordinary times it would have been possible to go along to the captain's cabin and the wheel room, and look down upon the lower deck.

Tom's eyes were not those of a cat to see well in the dark; but by this time he had grown a little accustomed to the semi-gloom. Besides, the clouds overhead chanced to lighten, as if in sympathy with his eager desire to see, and so it came that he suddenly discovered a dark object lying on the deck that moved a little even as he looked.

The girl too had been straining her eyes, and just as he noticed the object she whispered close to Tom's ear:

"Look! Oh, look there! Isn't that something moving, Tom?"

Before Tom could make any reply they both distinctly caught what sounded like a groan.

"Jack, is that you?" exclaimed Tom feverishly, still advancing as he spoke.

"Guess so, as far as I can tell," came the reply, that filled his chum's anxious heart with sudden relief.

Two seconds later the two searchers were alongside the other. Jack crouched on the deck. He was holding one hand to his head as though it ached; the other continued to move over his person after the manner of a person counting his ribs to make sure they were all there and intact.

Tom slipped an arm about his chum.

"What happened, and are you badly hurt, Jack?" he breathed, full of sympathy, while the girl, saying nothing, started to pat Jack on the head, as if mutely to express her feelings, though she seemed hardly to realize what she was doing.

"That's just what I'm trying to find out," muttered Jack, and then gave a sudden quiver as he continued: "Gee! that's a sore place on the back of my head! As sure as anything, the scoundrel did whack me there, just as I thought! I warrant there'll be a lump as big as a hen's egg and I won't be able to get that cap of mine on during the rest of the voyage! Awful luck!"

Tom hardly knew whether to feel alarmed by the seriousness of the occasion or to chuckle at his chum's sad lament. The idea of bothering about the fit of a cap when there were such momentous things at stake!

"I'll fix that lump business all right as soon

as I can get you to our room, Jack," Tom hastened to assure his chum. "But for goodness' sake tell us what happened to you! Bessie came to me, and said she feared there was some plot afoot to pounce on me in the dark, and when she learned that you were on the promenade deck she became more than ever alarmed. So we hurried out to find you."

"Well, I think you came along just in time to scare 'em off," said Jack hesitatingly, as if his wits were gradually returning after his rough experience. "I have a dim recollection of hearing one fellow say something to the effect that it wouldn't be safe to stay around any longer as someone was coming. They must have slipped across the barricade here, and gone down the ladder to the lower deck."

"Then you know there were *two* of them do you, Jack?" continued the other.

"Well, one man wouldn't talk to himself that way," observed Jack, still touching his head softly. "But there may have been a dozen for all I know."

"You didn't see them, of course?"

"Hardly, when I got that blow on my head as suddenly as if a rock had fallen from the sky! But hold on, I do remember feeling some one grabbing me, and—well, my vest has been torn open, so I guess they must have

been starting to search me when your coming scared the bunch away.

"You were lucky, I tell you, Jack. And I hope after this you'll be satisfied to take your constitutionals in the daytime. This dark deck isn't a very safe place these times, when they douse the glim mostly, and try to keep every light from showing, so no lurking sub can locate us."

"Oh, I've had my lesson, all right! Believe me, I don't mean to try it a second time. Honest now, do you think they would have tossed me over the side after going through all my pockets and finding nothing worth while?"

Jack's voice had a perceptible tremble to it, as though the idea were appalling to him, for which no one surely could blame the boy.

"I don't know what to say to that," Tom told him. "It seems monstrous; but then these German spies hold life cheap enough. See what some of them have been doing in America —putting bombs in the holds of passenger and freight steamers that carry munitions or food for the Allies, and which are timed to explode days later, perhaps sending the whole crew down to watery graves."

"That's so," muttered Jack. Then following up the subject with feverish eagerness, as

if it had a strange and horrible fascination for him after his own recent narrow escape, he added: "And they blow up munition plants, regardless of the helpless men and women who may be working there, set fire to grain elevators, and are ready for anything that will strike a blow against the enemies of their old Fatherland."

"But come, suppose you let me help you get on your legs again, Jack. Then we'll go to our room and I'll bathe your head with that witch hazel I have in my bag. And you musn't forget to thank Bessie because you owe everything to her. It was her alarm and her hunting me up to tell me that brought us out to look for you."

"I'll never forget it, never," said Jack in a low tone, as he managed to find the hand of the girl and squeeze it warmly. And I guess I'm a lucky fellow to have such good friends looking after me. But see here, Tom, do you think they mistook me for you when they tackled me in the dark here?"

"I shouldn't wonder if that were the truth," his chum assured him, "seeing that you say you felt some one running his hands over your person as if trying to find a hidden paper or something of the sort. Even such clever chaps as we have come to believe these German

spies to be can make blunders it seems. This Adolph Tuessig has queered his game in a number of ways, starting with his not finding more than a part of my father's papers."

Tom put an arm about his chum, and together they made their way along the deck.

"Where's Bessie?" suddenly asked Jack, noticing the absence of the girl.

"I think she must have fled from beside us." replied Tom; "though I didn't see her go. Perhaps she feared that her guardian might be concealed somewhere around and might learn of her presence. She is afraid of Mr. Potzfeldt, you know. How her people ever came to leave her in charge of such a man, I can't imagine, for she says they were English and French, and he— Well, we believe him to be thoroughly pro-German, even if he has become an American citizen."

"He's a relative of her mother's she told me," Jack explained. "And he had such an influence over the poor lady that after her death it was found he had been made Bessie's guardian, and had control of the money. I told Bessie I was sure that man must have been able to hypnotize her sick mother, to cause her to make such a will. I hate his queer eyes; they give me a strange feeling whenever he looks at me."

When the boys made their way inside the dimly lighted cabin Jack insisted on walking alone. He did not want to attract attention.

Once below, and locked in their room, Tom quickly got to work. He found his chum did have quite a large lump on his head, which he bathed until it felt much easier. Jack declared he had had his lesson, and was through with walking a darkened deck.

The vessel was now passing through the danger zone and more caution than ever was necessary in order to avoid the ever imminent submarine attacks. So it was that, jeopardized by danger from the sea outside and by perils from within the ship itself, the two youths flung themselves into their berths and were soon asleep.

CHAPTER X

THE ATTACK ON THE HIGH SEAS

"HELLO, there, Tom, it is daylight at last, and we didn't meet a submarine in the night."

With these cheery words Jack crawled out of the lower berth, and at once began to feel his head.

Tom, in the upper bunk, stirred, and then pushed his head into view.

"How are you feeling this morning after your adventure, Jack?" he asked, with a vein of real solicitude in his voice.

"Pretty punk, to be honest about it," admitted the other, cringing when he pressed a trifle too hard on the swollen part of his head. "But that lump has subsided considerably, for which, thanks. Mebbe after all I can bear to have that new plaid cap on, by stretching it a bit. I hate to pay good money for a thing, and then not use it.

"How about telling the purser or the captain about what happened to me last night, Tom?" and Jack grew serious.

"I've been thinking it over, and concluded

that we'd better keep quiet about it," the other replied. "In the first place we have nothing to show who the men were, and it would be silly to ask the officers of the ship to search every stateroom, as well as put questions to every passenger, in hopes of discovering a German spy aboard."

"Just as you say, Tom. We have only our suspicions to guide us, and they mightn't interest the captain, who has problems of his own to wrestle with now that we're getting so close to the danger zone. So we'll call the incident closed; and after this take our walks on the hurricane deck by daylight only."

After breakfast the boys again made their way to the deck.

Jack wanted very much to have a chance to talk again with Bessie, but failed to find it. She walked the deck, but in company with her grim guardian; and never once did Mr. Potzfeldt allow her to be alone.

"Like as not he suspects she brought you along last night, before they had a full chance to search me through and through, Tom," Jack remarked, well on toward noon.

"Just what I was thinking myself," the other told him. "And I rather imagine you'll not have another chance to get a word with the girl. If all goes well we ought to get to

our destination by another morning. They say that by nightfall we'll surely run across several destroyers, as they are always sent out to act as a convoy to big steamers in these tough times."

"But the rest of the day is still ahead of us," Jack ventured, "and nobody can say what may happen before the convoy reaches us. Notice that everybody has his or her glass in constant use. They scour the surface of the water ahead, and on both sides as far as they can, and are always looking for a stick that pokes up out of the sea like a warning finger; which would be a sub periscope, to a surety."

"And up on the bridge the captain keeps a constant vigil in addition," added Tom excitedly, for it would be impossible for any one not to be deeply impressed with all these thrilling events happening around him every minute of the time.

"Yes. And there are others of the crew watching also. They know what it must mean to be torpedoed. I shouldn't be surprised if some of them have passed through the experience at least once; for the survivors, I'm told, hunt another berth right away on landing."

Noon came and went. In spite of many false alarms nothing untoward had happened. Some of the passengers even began to pluck

up courage and an occasional laugh was heard again; something that had been foreign to the promenade deck for twenty-four hours at least.

The afternoon too was wearing away.

Both boys lounged in their chairs; indeed, it was next to impossible for any of the trans-Atlantic travelers to keep below longer than was necessary to eat their hurried meals. They wanted to be in the open air all the time. There was some sort of unexplained fascination about having the opportunity to see the danger when it bore down on them, if so be they were fated to endure an attack.

The sea was not calm, but could hardly be called rough. The waves rose and fell in a methodical way that allowed a splendid view of the near distance. Even the dorsal fin of a hungry shark that was sweeping around in eccentric circles in his search for food, was plainly visible.

Just then there were exclamations of interest, not unmixed with alarm, coming from a group of passengers close to where the boys with reading matter gripped in their hands, lay under their steamer rugs.

"What is it?" asked Jack, as he glanced hurriedly up.

"Porpoises wallowing, I should say," replied

the other, adjusting his binoculars to his eyes. "Yes,'" he added, "I guessed it right the first shot. They are having a great time off there and I can see no end of the dumpy things rolling along, all following the same general direction."

After that the same vigil was continued. The captain had not left the bridge long enough to eat his dinner, some of the passengers said, but had had it carried up to him. If anything came to pass, and a tragedy occurred, it could never be said that the commanding officer, who belonging to the British Naval Reserve, had neglected his duty.

"Honestly now," Jack said, when the subject arose between the two chums, "I believe the old man means to stick it out on the bridge until we arrive in port. I take off my cap to him. If that's the stubborn sort these British naval men are, I don't much wonder Britannia Rules the Waves."

"*Did,* you ought to say, Jack," corrected Tom, with a chuckle; "for since the submarine came along it's anybody's fight now as to who is mistress of the sea. Great Britain has Germany's Grand Fleet cooped up in the Kiel Canal; at the same time the subs roam the ocean as they please. One rules the surface, and the other seems to have control of the undersea part."

From that starting point the boys began to speak of the remarkable changes that had occurred in many things since the great world war broke out. Fleets of airplanes were serving as the eyes of each army and raining down tons upon tons of explosives on ammunition dumps, reserves, trains, railway stations where troops were gathered; and an endless number of other astonishing feats were of daily occurrence that a short time ago would have been looked on as wild dreams.

Suddenly came a warning from the crow's-nest of the steamer, "Periscope off the weather bow!"

This time it was no false alarm. The experienced seaman who spent his watch aloft in the crow's-nest with a glass glued to his eyes would not be apt to make a mistake.

The greatest excitement followed. Every one sprang to his feet. Faces turned white. Hands that gripped glasses trembled as with sudden palsy. Excited voices were heard. There was a sudden quiver throughout the great vessel, as the watchful commander on the bridge gave the order to change instantly her course.

All glasses were pointed in one direction. Some of the most sanguine declared they could make out a slender moving object that came

and went as the billows rolled onward, and which could be only the dreaded periscope of the waiting submarine pirate.

Then again loud cries were heard. This time they carried an even more terrible menace. It was bad enough to be told that a periscope had been sighted off the weather bow, but when many quivering fingers pointed to the near-by water, and the import of the fresh alarm could be understood, the sudden dread caused every heart, for the moment, to cease beating.

"A torpedo coming!"

"Look! You can see the bubbles swinging out on either side as it heads this way!"

"Everybody get his life-preserver on!" shouted an officer, running along the promenade deck and swinging his arms violently to attract attention.

"Gee, Tom, this looks bad!" gasped Jack.

"So it does, Jack," was the brief reply.

CHAPTER XI

ONE SUBMARINE LESS

"We are doomed!"

"What shall we do?"

"We can't do anything!"

"Oh, why did I undertake this trip!"

Such were some of the exclamations that rent the air. It was a moment of intense excitement. Some of the passengers quailed at the spectacle and fell to their knees, although unable to tear their horrified eyes away from the advancing trail of bubbles marking the coming of the deadly torpedo.

But the captain had done the right thing, and the vessel, having sheered aside to some extent, the torpedo missed striking the bow by twenty feet. When this fact was made apparent a husky cheer arose. The danger was averted, although, of course, another missile might already be on its way toward them.

It was generally thought that the captain would endeavor to run away at top speed, pursuing a zigzag course in order to avoid being struck when the crew of the submarine, finding

the torpedo had missed its mark, brought their boat to the surface and commenced to shell the steamer.

This was just what happened. One thing, however, some of the passengers had forgotten. It was suddenly brought to their attention when a loud crash came. Shrieks arose from some of the women, although they had up to then borne themselves wonderfully well. The first thought was that the ship was under fire and that a shell had burst aboard.

"It's our own gun crew getting busy!" cried Tom.

At this there was a faint cheer. Confidence began to return and color again to tint cheeks that had become pallid.

Tom had surmised the truth. The "sea-slinker" as Jack called the enemy craft, had come to the surface and was already chasing after them. It was time for those manning the quick-firing three-inch gun in the stern of the steamer to show what they could do to a pursuing submarine.

Bang!

A shell burst to one side of the steamer. The German gunners could play at that game also, it seemed. They meant to pursue the big steamer and keep up a constant fire in the hope that some lucky shot might cripple her

propellers or machinery, so that being unable to escape she would fall into their clutches.

Some of the more timid among the passengers hastened below, unable to look the peril directly in the face. Others, and women among them, remained on deck and cheered every time the gunners sent a shell back toward the low-down hull of the German submersible.

"That was a dandy shot!" shouted Jack, wild with excitement. "A little short of the mark, but in a direct line. Next time look out, Kaiser Wilhelm, or you'll get it in the neck!"

One shell from the pursuing boat had burst so close to the steamer that several of the passengers received slight wounds. Nothing serious resulted, however. A woman, who found her arm bleeding—in her excitement she had not felt the tingle of the scratch—wrapped her pocket handkerchief about the wound and continued to watch and cheer. Jack was glad to know she was an American woman, the wife of a consul over somewhere in France, going to offer her services to one of the hospitals.

The steamer, a fast one, was constantly increasing the distance between pursuer and pursued. This interfered with the aim of the gunners, and in order that they might be better able to gauge the distance the captain had the

engineers cut down the speed. That was a bit of valor worthy of the best traditions of the British navy.

Suddenly there arose a shout.

"A hit! A hit!"

The last shot made by the British gunners had struck fairly and squarely. It burst directly against the low deck of the submersible craft.

"She's stopped short!" cried one man gleefully.

"Yes, and she's going down by the head in the bargain!" yelled another.

The excitement increased as this was seen to be the truth. Instead of submerging in the ordinary way, the submarine was going down with her stern high in the air, so that the powerful propellers could be seen spinning aimlessly. Yes, she was sinking, and would never again lie in wait for a passenger steamer.

Again there came a cry, partly of frantic delight and not unmingled with awe:

"There! She'd disappeared! She's gone down! Hurrah for our brave gunners! They scored a bull's-eye that time!"

Everybody was shaking hands and carrying on in the most extravagant fashion.

There were hundreds of lives in the captain's keeping, as well as vast quantities of valuable

merchandise. It would of course have been the part of wisdom for him to order full speed ahead and to leave the victims of the tragedy to their justly merited fate. A companion submarine might be somewhere in the vicinity, for they generally hunt in couples, it is said.

But that would not be according to the traditions of the navy in which he was a reserve officer. So the steamer was brought around in a great circle and headed back for the exact spot where the enemy craft had last been seen.

The gun-crew stood at their posts, waiting and eager. If another periscope had been thrust up anywhere near by it would have instantly received a shot, and perhaps a double killing would have been brought about, something well worth boasting about when they should make port.

But no hostile persicope did they see, although many eyes kept watch over the waters surrounding them, so that nothing escaped their vigil.

"We must be getting pretty close to where she went down," remarked Jack, presently.

"I think you're right," Tom answered. "Look for signs of oil on the surface of the sea. It seems to me the waves are softened a whole lot right ahead of us. And you know that oil will do that every time. Sometimes a

bag of oil fastened to the side of a helpless drifting vessel in a storm has caused the billows to tone down and saved many a boat from being sunk."

"There *is* oil on the surface of the sea hereabouts, Tom!" affirmed Jack in a positive tone; and others echoed his observation.

With considerable awe and curiosity the passengers leaned over the rail and sought for some sign of a swimming mariner. Nothing rewarded their search. They cruised around the vicinity of the tragedy for all of fifteen minutes, and had a single German seaman been discovered he would certainly have been taken aboard, although the vessel must not be stopped wholly, lest they become the prey of another lurking submarine, the crew of which would not be apt to take pity on them because of their humane errand.

Here and there they discovered a few floating things such as might have come from a sunken boat, but in the foam and washing of the sea it was not possible to make absolutely certain. But of the crew of the submarine they saw nothing whatever, either living or dead.

"The entire crew must have gone down with the boat!" was the statement coming from an officer; and as the terrible nature of the tragedy

was fully understood, a feeling of depression and horror fell over the passengers in spite of their thankfulness over their own escape.

"Still, it's only what those who embark on a U-boat expect," Tom told a woman who expressed to him her horror at the fate that had overtaken the German crew. "They never go out but they count themselves as good as dead, I've read. And if by great good luck they get safely back into harbor again it's as though a new life had been given to them."

"Well, we're leaving the spot at last now," remarked Jack, with a sigh of relief. "The captain feels he has done everything that could be expected. His conscience can't trouble him. Those pirates of the twentieth century took their chances, and they lost out against our superior gunners, which is all there is to it."

"And think of what a small object our men had for a mark!" Tom went on to say. "I suppose, though, it's easier shooting from the steady deck of a big liner like this than from a jerky low platform, such as the deck of a submarine must present. That's why the Germans' shooting was so poor, even at a big target."

Soon they were once again pursuing their regular course. No one was sorry, for there must always be a certain amount of additional

danger attached to such an errand of mercy. These Germans would neither understand their motives, nor think of sparing them if an opportunity arose whereby the mistake of the first unlucky, undersea craft could be repaired.

"What was it those gunners had with them, but failed to drop overboard?" asked Jack, pointing as he spoke to some men who were placing some object under cover again.

"I don't exactly know," his chum replied, "but I've an idea it may have been what they call a depth bomb. It was possibly intended to drop it down after we'd passed the spot, if there were no actual signs that the submarine had been destroyed. But when the captain took note of all that oil on the sea he had no doubt about it; so the bomb wasn't used, after all."

"What is a depth bomb, Mr. Raymond?" asked a woman standing beside the two air service boys.

"It's a new invention that they use with good results in hunting these sea slinkers," she was told. "When a destroyer sights a periscope it speeds to the spot at the rate of nearly forty miles an hour. If the German submerges in a hurry so the destroyer's crew can't shoot his periscope away, and so destroy him, then they drop over one of those bombs.

It sinks to a certain depth and then explodes. In many cases they prove effectual, and nothing is ever seen of the sub again, while great quantities of oil and grease come up to tell what happened far below."

"Well, the many things that have been invented to take human life since this war started are wonderful—and terrible—" sighed the woman.

"As the afternoon wore away the excitement abated, and at four o'clock word was passed around that two British destroyers were in sight, coming out to convoy them through the approaching period of darkness.

"Now we'll have some protection for the rest of the trip," remarked Tom.

"And I'm glad of it," returned Jack quickly.

CHAPTER XII

SAFELY LANDED

The destroyers were coming under forced draft, those aboard having received a wireless message and also heard the sound of distant firing. The satisfaction of the commanders was great when they heard that another submarine had been beaten at its own game, and would lie in wait for passenger and munition-laden steamers no more.

Besides, by rights, the destroyers should have met the vessel early in the morning, since the day was the most dangerous time. An accident had delayed their coming; but since everything had ended well no one felt like complaining.

Cheers arose from the fighting crews of the convoying boats when the news was told. As their chief business nowadays was hunting the elusive German submarine the men rejoiced at hearing that another undersea pirate had been put to rest.

Soon the night descended on the sea. The ship was heading directly for port, and was

going at full speed. During most of the night this would continue, the liner being kept in almost absolute darkness as an additional precaution. On either side, at some little distance away, ranged a protecting destroyer; and every time the passengers looked in the direction of these slender and speedy little gray vessels, they seemed to breathe more easily.

There was little sleeping done that night aboard the steamer. The exciting time through which the passengers had so recently passed had its effect on their nerves. Then again anxiety played its part, for the daring marauders of the seas had been known to follow a steamer almost into port before making an attack.

But there was no alarm, and toward dawn the two chums, both of whom had managed to secure some sleep at odd times, knew from the commotion that they were entering port.

They turned over, as did many others aboard the liner, with sighs of relief, and went to sleep again, satisfied for the first time in three days that they could find rest without the chance of being aroused by the crash of a torpedo as it struck home.

Finally the air service boys found themselves ashore in England and waiting for a train that would carry them to London.

As neither of them had ever been out of the United States before it was only natural that they should feel an interest in everything around them. The England of to-day, from one end of the country to the other, is like an armed camp.

The boys were thrilled to see men in uniform and sailors from the fighting ships everywhere they looked. For the first time they began to feel that they were now getting near the front. Everything seemed to bespeak action. Artillery moved through the streets; while great tractors that were armed and looked like moving monsters, crawled along the roads, heading for the docks, to be shipped to some fighting field.

The boys saw everything with the deepest interest. Their enthusiasm instead of flagging grew more and more intense.

"All this makes me crazy to be over in France and finishing my education as an aviator," Jack cried, as they saw some crates being placed aboard a vessel; crates which they could see contained parts of airplanes.

"Given three more days, and our wish will have been granted," Tom told him.

"We ought to be in London before noon to-day," continued Jack.

"And if all goes well we'll be on our way

by to-morrow night," Tom added quickly. "We ought to spend just one night and a whole day in London, you know."

"I've always wanted to roam around the big city," Jack sighed, "but this is no time for sight-seeing, they say. London looks like a besieged city, and strangers have a pretty hard time getting around, being watched, and challenged wherever they go, especially if they look anything like Germans."

"I wonder how our friends Adolph Tuessig and Carl Potzfeldt will be able to move around London?" ventured Tom, as if a little amused at the thought.

"We don't know for certain whether Adolph was aboard our boat, do we?" Jack suggested.

"Well, we saw a man all muffled up come ashore, and take a taxi as soon as he could pass the customs officers. And somehow he seemed to strike me as just about as tall as Tuessig."

"I'm glad I had a chance to wave good-bye to Bessie Gleason. I wonder if we'll ever meet her again?"

"You never can tell. Queer things sometimes happen in this world. Neighbors who lived side by side for years in New York City and never even spoke to each other, have met face to face on the top of the pyramids. Yes,

and almost hugged each other, they were so tickled to see somebody from home."

"Anyway, she told me how a letter to her would be apt to reach her sooner or later," Jack said, with a grin. "I like that little girl. She's a smart one! But I'm afraid she's bound to have a hard time of it with that scowling guardian."

In due time the two chums reached London. They had been posted as to what they should do and had already engaged a room at a good small hotel.

London is in some ways pretty much the same to-day as in years past. There is the noise of the streets, and the great crowds to be met with everywhere. Of course the one remarkable change lies in the multitude of uniforms and the constant sight of wounded soldiers who have been sent over from the Continent to recover from their injuries.

All that afternoon the two young Americans went about to see what they could of the vast human bee-hive, of which they had heard so much. Jack in particular seemed never satisfied; the more he saw the greater his appetite for further experiences, and their time was fully occupied in this way up to twilight.

When they returned to their hotel, hungry and tired after a most energetic day, intending

to dress before going to the restaurant for dinner, a sudden fresh feeling of alarm took possession of Jack.

"Oh! I wonder if they have everybody on a war ration in London!" he exclaimed. It must be terrible to feel as empty as I do now, and then find you're limited to a couple of thin slices of war bread, without butter, a cup of weak tea, and some stewed prunes—I just hate prunes, you remember, Tom!"

Tom only laughed at him.

"Humbug, Jack! You'll find that even over in Berlin, where the pinch is a heap stronger than in London, the man who has the price can get plenty of food. We're going to have some mutton chops for dinner, and plenty of other good things in the bargain. As for a drink, I prefer coffee, even at a shilling a cup."

It turned out exactly as Tom had said. They went to a restaurant where foreigners still congregated, and were able to order a plentiful and satisfying meal; though certain articles usually on the bill of fare seemed to be tabooed on that particular day, and prices were certainly very high.

Jack, his fears set at rest, was soon feeling much better, both in body and mind, so that he was able to sit and look around at the other guests with some degree of curiosity.

"Wouldn't it be strange now," he remarked between bites, "if Carl Potzfeldt and pretty Bessie Gleason should drop in here while we were eating?"

"I hardly think that is likely to happen," Tom replied. "Still, I can't seem to get it out of my mind that that man at the corner table, who keeps his face hidden behind his newspaper has a familiar look. Adolph Tuessig is, we believe, in London, and he has to eat just the same as we do."

"Suppose we hurry along then with our meal, Tom, and when that fellow starts to pass out we can manage in some way to jostle him, so as to get a look at his face. Of course we couldn't have him arrested, or anything like that; but I'd like to know from curiosity if nothing else, whether he was aboard our steamer."

"Agreed," Tom replied, hurrying his eating, while he kept one eye on the table in the corner where the man under suspicion sat, his face concealed behind a copy of an evening paper.

"I wonder whether we'll keep on running across that Tuessig when we get over there in France," continued Jack, as though the idea disturbed him somewhat.

"Nothing would please me better," his chum told him between his set teeth. "Because in

that event I might have a chance, sooner or later, of examining his pockets, and finding out if he is still carrying that stolen paper around with him."

"You seem to believe he didn't turn it in to the German Embassy at Washington, from the way you talk."

"I imagine he counts it only a bite," Tom continued, reflectively; "and feels that they would blame him for not securing the entire design while about it. So he keeps the paper on his person, and continues to hope he may yet be able to find the rest—perhaps by robbing me. There may be another way of looking at it though."

"How?" asked Jack, still munching away.

"Adolph Tuessig may have his orders direct from the Wilhelmstrasse headquarters in Berlin. Perhaps he's on his way there now to make his report, and deliver over his finding. If that happens to be the case I hope he never arrives there—that either the British or the French discover his double character, and arrest him."

"What do you suppose they'd do with him, Tom?"

"If the proof of his being a spy could be found he'd be executed without any doubt. That's the way they do things over here these days, Jack."

"There, he's lifted up his check to look at it, Tom, still keeping his face turned partly away. I believe he's preparing to slip out by passing among those tables on the further side of the restaurant. Shall we try to waylay him, and get a look at his face?"

Tom picked up their own check quickly.

"There he goes, now, and if you follow me I'll fix it so we can rub up against him near the exit. We can't do anything to bring about his arrest but it'll be a little satisfaction to let the slippery rascal understand we're up to his game."

They hurried around, keeping the retreating man under observation. The latter reached the cashier's desk and stood there a brief time paying his account. Then he made for the exit. Tom threw down more than enough change to pay for their meal, after which, with Jack at his heels, he kept after the object of their pursuit.

Just as the door was reached, held open by an employee of the restaurant, the two young fellows passed one on either side of the man who kept his face so well hidden. First Tom jostled his elbow, causing the subject to glance hastily that way, to receive a muttered apology. Then Jack did just the same on the other side.

The man hurried outside where he imme-

diately lost himself in the crowd; but he acted as though considerably annoyed by the encounter.

Tom and his chum made no attempt at following him. They had attained their object, which satisfied them both.

"It was the slippery scamp, all right!" chuckled Jack.

"Yes, no other than Adolph Tuessig," added the second young aviator. "I saw his face plainly, and although he's changed his looks more or less, so as to appear like a Swiss citizen perhaps, I easily recognized him. And if anything else were needed to settle the matter, he had a decided *limp* as he hurried off."

"Which I suppose you lay to the teeth of that splendid bulldog of yours, eh, Tom?" laughingly added the other.

As both of the air service boys were exceedingly tired, and there did not seem to be much worth looking at going on in London, once night had settled down over the great English metropolis, they returned to their hotel. Here they sat around for a while and then sought their room, bent on securing a good night's rest, the first they had had an opportunity to enjoy since entering the danger zone.

Once again it chanced that they counted without their host. They forgot they were

under a London roof, instead of in peaceful Bridgton, more than three thousand miles away across the broad Atlantic. They also neglected to take into consideration the important fact that London was not so far distant from German shores, from which flocks of great airships were accustomed to setting sail at certain periods, for a raid over England.

It was just at midnight when both boys were aroused by a tremendous clatter outside. They heard the discharge of guns, and loud shouts, and bouncing out of bed rushed to the window to see what was happening, while the noise increased with each passing second!

CHAPTER XIII

THE ZEPPELIN RAID ON LONDON

"Is the old town on fire, Tom?" Jack gasped, as the two air service boys listened to the noise which was growing wilder every moment.

"It must be the Zeppelins have come and London is under fire from the skies!" Tom exclaimed.

"Oh! Hurry up, and let's get dressed!" cried the excited Jack. "I wouldn't miss this for anything! Just to think what we'll have to boast about when we get home—if ever we do. There's nothing to hinder our going out on the streets, is there?"

Tom was already flinging his clothes on with reckless speed, and did not stop to answer.

Presently the youths found themselves hurrying along the street, with hundreds of other curious sightseers, who seemed to forget the terrible danger hanging overhead in their eagerness to see the bombarding air fleet.

Coming to an open "circus," or intersection of two streets, around which the buildings are set in a circle, they found it filled by a

seething mass of people. There were men and boys; women struggled with the crowd; and girls, who had better have stayed at home in some degree of safety, added to the throng.

All were staring up toward the heavens, covered with gray clouds. Powerful search-lights played across the sky, the long shafts of white light looking very weird.

Loud cries attested to the fact that one of the attacking airships had been discovered. Many fingers pointed it out, and as Tom had carried his binoculars along he quickly had the glasses focussed on the small object high up in the heavens.

"It's certainly a big balloon, and looks like a long sausage," he told Jack, as he stared entranced. "And all around it I can see queer little puffs of smoke breaking out, though most of them seem to be below the Zeppelin. Those must be the shrapnel shells they're firing up at the invader from the anti-aircraft guns used to defend the city. They're mounted on roofs of houses, they say."

It was a thrilling sight, and one the two chums would not have missed for a great deal. The lone Zeppelin was steering directly over a part of the city which was densely populated by the poor. Doubtless other great airships were moving in lanes that would take them

over outlying districts. The fleet had evidently separated on nearing the city, thus minimizing the risk of being brought down by volleys or shrapnel, or the efforts of airplane defenders who were already rising to give battle to the German monsters.

"There, they dropped something, for I could see what looked like a spark falling!" exclaimed Tom suddenly.

"That was a fire bomb," said a man standing near, who probably had passed through a number of similar attacks, and was well posted. "It is filled with combustible fluid, and on bursting sets fire to everything around."

Hardly had he spoken when they heard a terrific report. At the same instant there was a vivid flash, as of fire. The boys were reminded of lightning on a black night; but in this case the glare stayed, as though the fire had accomplished the work intended.

Quickly following there came another frightful smash.

"That was a regular bomb!" cried the man close to Tom. "Chances are it's done considerable damage, for it must have dropped in one of the congested districts."

"But there are no fortifications inside London, are there?" asked Jack, horrified at the thought of death and destruction being scat-

tered among just such a crowd as had gathered in the streets around them.

"Oh! that's all tommyrot," explained the man, with a hoarse laugh. "They make out London is a regular fortified city and that they are smashing docks and sinking munition-laden steamers, as well as blowing up barracks. All they do is to murder half a hundred poor women and children and burn some of the crowded tenements. But just wait, the time will come when we'll get our revenge on Berlin!"

A second Zeppelin was discovered sailing along. The crash of bursting bombs became almost continuous, as though those above were trying to empty their reservoirs while passing over the capital that seemed to be the particular object of German hatred.

Carried along with the crowd, eager to see with their own eyes some of the exciting scenes, the two American lads found themselves in a more squalid section of the city. No doubt this was a part of what was known as the slums.

The narrow streets were filled with sightseers, men, women and children, as though the grimy tenements had emptied their entire contents for the occasion. Although the danger was great the crowd seemed to look upon

it all as a sort of holiday affair gotten up for their amusement.

Zipp! Bang!

Suddenly there was a blinding flash accompanied by a deafening detonation.

One of the bombs from a passing Zeppelin had dropped upon a row of tenements nearby and the walls were hurled into the street.

The greatest confusion followed, the crowd rushing this way and that in a delirium of excitement. Tom and Jack had been knocked down with many others by the concussion, but received only a few minor bruises.

"Hurt much, Jack?"

"Not a great deal, Tom. How about you?"

"A few scratches, that's all."

"Let's get out of this!"

They were quickly on their feet, and staring at the scene that lay before them. Already cries were heard from the mass of wreckage, and some of the more courageous among the spectators commenced to drag out the victims. As a rule these seemed to be women and children, the boys noticed.

The tremendous throng that gathered prevented their getting close up; but they could see ambulances come driving wildly to the spot, having been held in readiness for just such a call.

Into these the wretched victims of German attack were hurried, and in a short time all that remained of the happening was a mass of bricks and stones and grimy plaster that encumbered the narrow street.

It was shortly after this, and while the racket was still at its height, that a cheer suddenly broke out. Looking up to where all eyes seemed to be directed, Tom and his comrade saw a thrilling spectacle in the heavens.

One of the twin Zeppelins was on fire! The crowd could see a glare spring up, and Jack, who at that moment had the glasses, announced to Tom that the huge aircraft was falling like a rocket-stick after its ascent.

Whether some of the shrapnel had found its mark, or a daring airplane pilot had managed to get above the Zeppelin to drop a fire bomb they could not tell just then. Nor did any one care particularly. The one exulting thought was that an enemy had been put out of action and that the entire crew of more than thirty men must meet the death they had just been dealing out to innocent people in London.

It was a wonderful sight, one which would never be forgotten by those who stood and gaped. They were thrilled by the spectacle of that great mass falling swiftly like a meteor drawn earthward, burning as it came.

Jack declared he could see objects that might be human beings falling from the blazing mass as it neared the earth. He held his breath as he looked, shocked by the awfulness of the spectacle.

The wrecked Zeppelin disappeared beyond the roofs of rows of London houses. Then there came a rush of tens of thousands, wild to reach the spot in order to see all that was left of the great airship.

Jack would have joined in the rush, but Tom proved wiser.

"This man, who ought to know, Jack, says it's much further out than most of the people suspect, beyond the outskirts of the city proper. Let it go for to-night. Perhaps we'll find our way there in the morning."

Jack complained a little but decided in the end that it was best not to wander over London at that time of the night.

"But above all things, Tom," he said, as they started back toward their hotel, "we must see the wreckage of that airship in the morning. It's in line with our own business, understand, since we, too, are aviators. And don't be afraid that I'll be knocked out if we happen to run across one of the poor wretches who fell. I expect to get used to such things over in France. For all I know some day or other I may wind up by the same channel."

"Huh," was Tom's grunted reply, when they turned in at the hotel entrance, "if any of the men fell to the ground they'll hardly be left lying around for hours for us to view."

The raid over London was at an end. The remaining Zeppelin sped away, as if loth to accept further chances of meeting the fate of its sister craft. Doubtless British airmen would follow after and harrass the invader as long as it remained over the land; and even when the Channel was reached they might still pursue with the dogged determination characteristic of their race.

The boys finally got to sleep again and were not disturbed with further outcries. There were other airships over England that night, they afterwards learned, but these did not get past the barrage fire that protected the metropolis, dropping their stock of bombs over Kent down nearer the coast.

In the morning the air service boys managed to reach the scene of the wreckage, but were unable to get close up because of the enormous crowds. Still, they saw the mass of wreckage, and even watched a corps of workmen digging away part of the piled-up airships in search of other bodies supposed to be still unfound.

All that day Tom and Jack went around London seeing what they could of the city.

They came upon several other places where damage had been done by the air raiders, and never would they forget the horror and detestation that filled their souls when they saw other hospital vans removing still more of the victims of that atrocious method of conducting war upon defenseless men, women and children.

"I can't get over to Pau any too soon," said Jack savagely, as they stood and watched the heart-rending scenes around one of the devastated districts. "I want to finish my schooling and be sent to the front to join the French and American fliers. If only they'll take us in the Lafayette Escadrille, and put us to work raiding German cities, I'll be pleased."

"The Lafayette Escadrille doesn't engage in that sort of work," Tom reminded him. "They leave that to the French bombing machines. Their business is to engage German airplanes single-handed and to drop bombs on military camps back of the lines. Also during a battle to keep in constant touch with the advancing troops, and by their system of signals have the fire-control of the batteries in their hands."

"Well," added the impatient Jack, "so long as it's getting a whack at the Kaiser I don't suppose it matters much what kind of work we engage in."

They had made all their arrangements for crossing the Channel the following night. There was more or less red tape connected with it, for these were war times, and the spy scare had not yet entirely died out of England, and foreigners were being watched closely.

But the two Americans had with them papers to prove just who they were, and why they were headed for France. They also met several men connected with the British air service, who were pleased to show them many little courtesies.

"But we do hope America will soon decide to come in and take her part in the job we've got on our hands," these men told them more than once.

Night came, and the air service boys boarded a train that left London, connecting with the boat that was to cross the Channel. Everything was conducted with a grimness and secrecy that impressed the two young Americans as being warlike.

"It's plain to be seen England has long since passed the first stage of the war," remarked Tom, who noted all such things. "You know at first they tried to act as though it was only a small affair, after all. London was as bright as ever, with business going on much the same. It's a different spirit that's abroad nowadays.

The British bulldog has shut his teeth hard; and when he does that he never lets go—that is, hardly ever, but there was a time more than a hundred years ago when he released his grip on our country."

In the course of time they found themselves aboard the vessel that along toward midnight was to start from Dover for France. Once they left port, the utmost vigilance was exercised. Lights were extinguished, and in the gloom of the night they proceeded.

It was another thrilling experience not soon to be forgotten. Every little sound, every little wave slapping against the side of the boat, seemed to the excited passengers to mean sudden peril. There was no thought of sleep on the part of any one; even the numerous Red Cross nurses and attendants and the ambulance drivers, going to the front for service, remained on deck every minute of the time.

Each passenger had a life belt fastened on, to be ready if the hidden danger presented itself. But again fortune was kind; and if there were any cruising German submarines in the Channel that night they failed to run upon the regular boat from Dover to Calais.

Once safe in the Calais harbor the passengers had a chance for a few hours sleep. With the coming of morning they landed, passing through

all the customary formalities that more than ever are exercised in war times, to make sure that enemy spies do not get a footing on the soil of France.

Jack was highly pleased when finally the air service boys found themselves speeding toward the south of France, where the aviation camp at Pau was located, not far from the snow-capped Pyrenees Mountains that constitute the boundary line between the republic and Spain.

"Before another night we'll be there!" was his exultant exclamation; and Tom shared his enthusiasm, for he was as eager as his chum to complete his schooling in aviation and begin his task of flying for the beloved French republic.

CHAPTER XIV

AT THE FRENCH FLYING SCHOOL

At last the two air service boys were lodged in a city within connecting distance of the great aviation field at Pau, where some of the most successful among French and American air pilots have received their instruction in the art of flying.

Both Tom and Jack were soon at home in the camp. As they possessed some knowledge of French, and were studying diligently to acquire a wider acquaintance with the language, they found it possible to understand most of what was said to them, and also make some sort of reply.

They were deeply impressed with what they saw during that first day at Pau. Permanent sheds had been erected in place of the former canvas hangers; and German prisoners of war had been used to build a narrow-gauge railway running from the camp to the town.

This allowed the students a chance to live at a distance and still continue their daily work at the aviation school. The best of instructors

were found there, men who had made their names famous in their work.

Tom was, of course, in his element, and, quiet, studious and industrious, he soon became a favorite with his instructors, who were quick to recognize that his former American instructor had said truly when he pronounced the youth a natural-born aviator.

Only those with previous experience were allowed in the sector to which the chums were assigned. Novices had other places, where their first blundering work might not act as a menace to those who were near the end of their work in the school.

The various types of French machines interested Tom in particular, from the start, for they differed vastly from anything he had as yet handled. The little Nieuport especially held his attention, for he knew very well that that was the airplane in general use on the French front for fighting. It is capable of making the most extraordinary speed, and can, moreover, be manipulated by an expert with the ease that an accomplished horseman on the plains handles his broncho, and can perform the most amazing feats in the air that any one can imagine.

Tom fondled the first Nieuport he came across lovingly, and imagined himself mounted in the

seat, flying above the hostile lines, daring a German airman to ascend and meet him in a duel to the death thousands of feet above the earth.

But just as he anticipated, Tom had to start at the bottom of the ladder again, and undo much that he had already learned. As for Jack, he began to despair of ever being able to master the intricate education that every French air pilot must pass through before he is allowed to go to the front.

Each one entering the school is placed where it is believed he will do the most effective work. One applicant may be better qualified to man a bombing plane than for the more dangerous calling of a fighting unit, where great dexterity and lightning-like quickness in making a decision mean everything.

The bombing planes are much larger and slower, for, as a rule, when going out on a long trip to damage the enemy's lines of communication these are fully protected by guards in the shape of Nieuport pilots, who will defend them against the enemy airmen, if such should rise to waylay them.

Tom went forward with astonishing rapidity. Day after day he was in the air, and his instructor took the greatest interest in his rapid progress, for he felt he had what he called a

"prodigy" on his hands. He realized that unless some unfortunate accident cut Tom's career short, the Lafayette Escadrille would soon receive another recruit whose record in time might equal that of any of its most shining lights, some of whom had already given their lives to the service of France.

The youths found that making successful landings was a very important factor in the education of an aviator, and had often to be attempted under difficult conditions. Clumsiness at this has played havoc with many a bright pupil's hopes, and even taken lives as its toll.

From one class Tom passed into another. Jack strove earnestly to keep abreast of his more accomplished chum, and was doing very well, but still fell far behind Tom's record. Indeed, the marvelous manner in which Tom Raymond climbed the ladder made him the talk of the camp. The Americans there were proud of Tom. They believed that, given time, he was fated to become one of their best and most famous flyers; and none of them, placing the service far ahead of his own personal hopes, showed the least jealousy because of his rapid promotion.

Various types of machines were given to Tom to handle, and he seemed to be perfectly at home with them all. It was "born in him,"

as his genial instructor explained it, and everybody agreed that he was a wonder.

Eventually he was allowed to mount to a very high altitude, further than he had ever gone before, so that the snow-capped Pyrenees seemed on a level with his machine.

His first trial at such a high altitude flight was exciting enough, though its successful accomplishment soon made it an easy task. In the little Nieuport he mounted to the great height. Then the machine was made to dive rapidly for a short distance, after which Tom gave a sharp pull on the controls, forcing the machine to climb suddenly, at the same time shutting off the motor.

When the little plane lost its speed, it fell over backwards. Just at the proper second, when the machine had reached the line of diving, Tom turned on the spark and once more resumed his flight, to repeat the experiment again and again until it became an old story with him.

Jack wondered how successful he would be when the time came for him to try this necessary evolution, which some day when in action and wishing to escape from an enemy might be the means of saving his life.

Tom was next put to work on other even more dangerous tactics, all of which have to

be learned at the French aviation schools. Finally, when the pilot is deemed properly qualified, he may be sent to the fighting front, there to take his place with the veterans in the art, who have perhaps won their right to be called "ace," because they have already brought down at least five enemy machines, and can prove each and every encounter.

"Corkscrew looping" was not so very difficult for Tom, although generally considered so by most aspirants for honors.

Only the very best pupils are considered fit subjects for the most advanced course, known as the "vrille," but so ambitious a student as Tom Raymond would not be satisfied without attempting it.

This manoeuvre consists in a series of spiral movements constituting a rapid descent. The plane is tipped at an acute angle, and set to spinning on one wing. An accomplished aviator will take as many as eight of these speedy spirals, one after the other, and thus fall a distance of some five thousand feet, when he can suddenly recover, and fly away in safety from the flock of enemy machines by which he had been suddenly beset high in the air.

It is a manoeuvre full of danger to the novice, and a number of ambitious aviators have lost their lives in trying to accomplish

it. Tom was one of those who mastered the feat, just as his far-seeing instructor believed he would be. Before he left the school at Pau he was able to do the "vrille" wonderfully well, and thus became an object of admiration and envy to the American colony of intending fliers.

One day there unexpectedly turned up there an old friend from the other side of the Atlantic —no other than Dawes, whom they had left working steadily away at the Government aviation school in Virginia. The boys were delighted to see him again, and during the remainder of their stay at Pau the trio were much in one another's company.

Jack continued to make steady progress, although it was evident that he would never be in the same class as his more brilliant chum. Finally their eagerness to get nearer the front was rewarded, for they received permission to go to another aviation field.

This was also in southern France, at Casso, on the shores of a long lake less than an hour from Bordeaux. Here the Flying Corps has a range of its own, with a number of captive balloons and a series of moving targets out on the lake.

The pupil is taken up in a double-seated plane, and operates the quick-firing gun or, as the French call it, a "mitrailleuse." At first it

is exceedingly difficult to shoot down from a rapidly moving plane, but after considerable practice the eye becomes educated to the changing perspective, when the airman finds it as easy to register hits as though he were upon the solid earth.

Finally came the day when the two young Americans, having completed their schooling, were allowed to offer their services at the front to fill the sadly depleted ranks of the foreign Flying Corps. They left the training camps, and took train for the region where the German invading host was being held at bay by the allied armies.

"Now, I guess we'll see service before long, Tom!" cried Jack eagerly.

"I shouldn't wonder but what you are right," was the reply.

CHAPTER XV

A LUCKY MEETING ON THE ROAD

"LISTEN, Tom! What do you suppose that far-away rumble can be? Surely not thunder at this season of the year!"

The air service boys were standing on the platform of a small station, where they had been set down by the train from Paris. The track went no further, having been destroyed in some of the furious fighting that had taken place in that region since the days when the Germans, defeated along the Marne, made their famous "withdrawal" to the banks of the Aisne, where they had previously prepared great trench works.

The boys were far from being alone. Soldiers wearing the uniforms of various French sections of the army clustered in knots here and there, or sat philosophically waiting to be taken care of. They, too, were on their way to the front, and seemed to have the utmost confidence that in due time orders would arrive for them to take up the march along the road, to relieve some of the fighters who had

latterly been bearing the brunt of the fierce attacks of the enemy.

"No, I don't believe such a thing as thunder could happen over here, at this time of year, when the spring hasn't yet arrived. You're right Jack! what you hear is something that, as the days go by, will become a very old story with both of us; only increasing a thousandfold in volume at times."

"Yes, the growl of big guns on the fighting line!" exclaimed Jack in great excitement.

"Just that, and nothing less," his comrade assured him. "But about the time you were listening I was trying to grasp what those two French sergeants over there were saying to each other. It was about the rumble in the air, and they seemed to be drinking it in eagerly; just as a hunting dog might the scent of the deer he was following."

"They look like old hands at the fighting game, Tom. See, one is grizzled, and his face, through exposure, like wrinkled parchment!"

"Watch him walk, and you'll detect a slight limp," cried Tom. "That tells the story! He's been through the mill! It may be he has fought in almost every battle since the war started, and has been wounded many times. You can see the mark of a scar across his left cheek. That has likely been caused by a sabre slash."

"Yes, and Tom, when he lifts his left arm I notice that he gives a little grimace, as though it hurts more or less still. Why, that grizzled old chap must be a hero of heroes! He means to get back to the front, and have still another try at the Boches."

The distant muttering sound rose and fell from time to time as the breeze dictated. It was not unlike the roll of the waves on the beach at the seashore, only many times more significant, now that the boys realized its real meaning.

In imagination they could see the smoke of the battle, even to the charging of one side or the other across the open, where the staccato rattle of the machine guns would lessen their forces, and cause ominous gaps to appear in the ranks.

"Well," Jack presently remarked, yawning as he spoke, "the question still remains, how are we going to bridge over the remaining distance separating us from the camp of the Lafayette Escadrille, to which we have been assigned?"

"We've come so far, all right," Tom told him, with his jaws set in a determined fashion that indicated his "never say die" nature; "and we'll find some way of getting to our journey's end. I never dreamed that we'd be dumped

off like this. But then, the walking isn't so very bad, you may have noticed, and if it comes to the worst we might depend on Shank's mare to take us along."

"But Tom, we've got our duffle with us!" expostulated the other, in sheer dismay. "I wouldn't mind walking to the camp; but I'd hate to see myself loaded down with all that stuff. We'd look like gypsies on the tramp!"

"I've got an idea that may help us out, and land us where we want to fetch up, sooner or later."

"Blurt her out! I know I'm tired of this!"

"There's the main road over there," Tom remarked, pointing as he spoke; "and all the while we've been resting here I've watched streams of vehicles of every description passing toward the front or to the rear, as well as detachments of soldiers in uniform on their way to the front."

"Besides ambulances and motor lorries loaded with wounded Frenchman!" added his chum. "And munitions and supplies! There have been a number of field batteries heading toward the fighting line. And, look! There goes an armored tank with its British crew, rolling steadily along, just as if it were an ordinary farm tractor engaged in pulling a series of plows after it."

"Well, I've been watching closely," continued the far-seeing and less excitable Tom, "and I've noticed that while every ambulance going to the rear is loaded to capacity with wounded Frenchmen—singing and acting as though on a picnic instead of being taken to the rear to have an arm or a leg removed it may be—those going up are, as a rule, light."

"Yes," quickly observed Jack, grasping the idea. "And some have officers inside, giving them the chance to save the long and tiresome tramp. Is that your scheme?"

"Nothing venture, nothing gain, they say," chuckled the other. "Let's shoulder our stuff here, and move over to the road. Then we can tackle one of the ambulance drivers who looks a bit friendly. When he learns who we are and where we're going he may take pity on us and give us a lift."

"It sounds good to me, so let's be on the move," Jack hastily said, starting to load himself down with luggage.

A short time afterward the pair had reached a spot where they could stop one of the empty army ambulances with their red crosses painted on the sides, the driver also carrying the well-known insignia of his calling on his left sleeve.

"Here comes an empty ambulance," remarked Tom, presently, scrutinizing every vehicle in

sight. "There—just back of that lorry loaded down with foodstuff. We'll try the game out on him for a flier, Jack."

"Hope he's inclined to be a cheerful sort of chap, then," grumbled the other, "because I'm getting mighty tired of standing here, and watching the procession go past."

Closer came the ambulance, its progress being impeded somewhat by the big van in front of it.

He's staring as hard as anything at us right now," muttered Jack. "That may, and again may not, be a good sign. Get ready to run alongside, Tom, and brush up your best *parlez vous Francaise,* so as to make him understand what we want the worst kind. Oh, I do hope he says 'get aboard with all your traps, and I'll drop you at the aviation camp and hangars which lie right on my way to the front'."

"What's this?" cried Tom half to himself. "Seems to me I ought to know that chap; and yet it can't be possible! This is over in France, and we're listening to the roar of big guns right now at the front! Yet if I didn't know different I'd say that was Neal Kennedy!"

"What?" gasped Jack, clutching his chum's arm in sudden surprise.

"Say, whatever does this mean?" the driver of the Red Cross ambulance sang out, as he

swung his machine to the side of the road and leaned forward, to stare at the pair standing just beyond. "Am I dreaming, or do I see Tom Raymond and Jack Parmly in uniform and standing on French soil? What ever brougt you boys over here I'd like to know. And what are you doing in those duds, tell me? Do you really belong to the Flying Corps?"

Jack and Tom dashed out, and were soon shaking Kennedy's hands. Neal Kennedy, a Bridgeton boy, was delighted to run across home folk in this most unexpected fashion. Neal had gone away from home many months before Tom and Jack conceived their plan of flying for France, and as he had never been intimate with the air service boys, and as Tom and Jack had talked but little of their plans in Bridgeton until they were ready to sail for France, Kennedy had not heard of their joining the Flying Corps.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW NEAL WON HIS DECORATION

GREAT was the astonishment and delight of Neal Kennedy on learning that his two former schoolmates were now on their way to the front to join the famous American escadrille that had for a long time been rendering such a good account of itself in the service of France.

"It's hard for me to believe I'm awake, fellows," he assured them, his eyes still kindling with eagerness as he surveyed their uniforms and military caps. "To think of you having spent all that time in Virginia learning to fly; and then finishing down at Pau, while I've been running an ambulance and carrying wounded poilus to the rear!"

"Don't say a word against your calling, Neal!" exclaimed Tom. "Why, it's great! Every day you fellows are risking your lives!"

Neal drew in a long breath.

"Thank you for saying that, Tom. You know, there are times when it galls a fellow to find himself just an ambulance driver—a

fellow who, if he had his way, would be doing stunts in the air, and striking blows against the Kaiser. But, gee! that's foolish, and I suppose there is some honor about it. See here!"

He opened his coat and showed them a decoration which, modest fellow that he was, he had actually kept hidden out of sight.

"Why, that is the Croix de Guerre, and something anybody might be proud to wear! Do you mean to say they decorated you with it, Neal Kennedy?" gasped Jack, touching the emblem almost reverently, for he knew it was the hope of every French soldier to march home some day with such an embellishment on his breast.

"Oh, they seemed to think it was some sort of especial act of bravery, just because I drove my ambulance on the field while the shells were bursting around me and loaded up with some of the poor fellows, escaping by an inch when the Germans came rushing up. I just couldn't help it. I felt mean that day, as if I was being cheated out of all the fun."

"Shall we get aboard, and go along with you, Neal?" asked Tom, fearing lest by lingering there all of them were losing precious time.

"Sure thing, fellows," they were immediately

told. "Plenty of room here on this seat. Just chuck your stuff inside, and we'll be off. As luck has it, I know where the American fliers have their roost far back of the lines. To tell you the honest truth it's against rules, but I'll take you in and, more than that, sheer a bit out of my way just to drive you over toward Bar-le-Duc. It sounds mighty fine to hear good old United States spoken after all this foreign chatter."

This was good news to the chums. It certainly seemed that they were playing in great luck to run across first of all an old acquaintance in such a remarkable fashion, and then learn that he could drop them at the camp of the Lafayette Escadrille without any particular trouble.

They could not make fast time of it, such was the choked condition of the road. There was always a multitude of vehicles going and coming, together with marching troops, and even batteries on the move to the front to take their turn at engaging the foe.

The sounds beyond gradually increased in volume as the ambulance crept gradually closer to the region where French and German big guns answered each other, though many miles apart.

"We'll be there in time for supper, boys,"

the driver of the Red Cross ambulance kept assuring his two impatient passengers every now and then. "And let me tell you those fellows of the Lafayette Escadrille are a pretty lively bunch, all right. I've talked with some of them lately, and I've known a few of them who are gone—Chapman, Prince and Rockwell."

He glanced a bit anxiously toward Jack as he said this, but if he expected to see the other wince in the least he was mistaken.

"Oh! we've grown accustomed to that sort of talk, Neal," explained Jack quietly. "We know what chances we're taking, and have made up our minds to accept the worst. If either or both of us are brought down by the Boches it's no worse a fate than being shot to pieces with one of those big shells. And if Uncle Sam gets in this muddle that's the fate thousands of us will likely meet."

The sun sank lower, and night was not far distant. The big guns no longer fretted the air in the distance with their constant booming. The absence of the heavy reverberations was a relief to the tortured ears of the newcomers, as yet all unused to such a tremendous clamor.

Tom was using his binoculars as well as he could, considering the motion of the ambulance, the roadway being far from smooth, with more or less jostling much of the time.

"What interests you up there, Tom?" demanded his chum, noticing the other scanning the heavens in front of them.

"There are planes aloft, a number of them. But I imagine that is pretty nearly always the case when the weather permits. Some are so far away they look like dots. I suppose those are German Fokker and Gotha machines, of which we've heard so much, as they do their fighting with them against our Nieuports."

"Let me have a peep! I want to see my first Fokker; though I suppose in time I'll get my fill of seeing them, especially when the pilot is pelting me with lead from his machine-gun."

After a minute of focusing and staring, Jack continued:

"Yes, I guess those far-away ones must be, as you say, German craft hovering over their own lines, and mebbe having an occasional fight with some French or American flier who ventures across No Man's Land to engage them. But there's a machine heading this way now, and coming on fast, as if about to land."

"We are close to the camp," the ambulance driver assured him. "In fact it's just half a mile further on. When we've rounded that bend ahead maybe you'll get a whiff of genuine Yankee cooking in the bargain, for I hear the boys have succeeded in finding a chap from

the States who used to be a *chef* in a Broadway lobster palace, and can do things up brown. I wish I had an invitation to join them some evening. I'm crazy for real food, cooked as we cook at home."

Jack felt sorry for Neal. He hoped the time would come some day when he could invite him to mess with the aviators, many of whom the other already knew to speak to.

"You see," continued their friend, the driver, still leaking information as new subjects occurred to him, "the escadrille doesn't hold out at their hangars exactly, but has quarters in an abandoned villa some little distance in the rear. It allows the boys a chance to enjoy some of the comforts of real living, so far as beds go, and rooms in which to sleep. I might also mention a cooking department, and a mess table at which they often entertain French officers high up in command. I don't know but what Joffre himself, and Petain, too, have been their guests when they chanced to be near by."

All this was deeply interesting, to Jack in particular. He was sure that the Americans were being treated royally by the French, who appreciated the work being accomplished daily by those from across the sea, and he longed to be in his place.

The bend of the road being presently reached, Tom and Jack saw a building that had once been a handsome and well-kept villa, though now showing some of the scars of war. How it chanced to have been left standing at all, with all that terrible fighting going on in the vicinity these many months, was more or less of a mystery. But the Americans had taken up their quarters under the villa roof, and made themselves at home, after the free-and-easy fashion of their kind.

Just then a car came from the opposite direction, and two young chaps in the full garb of aviators jumped out, to vanish inside the house. Jack noted that they had on fur-lined shoes and combinations, also close fitting leather flying hoods with goggles. He knew from this that they had just come from work, and possibly may have even been aboard that airplane which he had seen drawing nearer until it dipped below the desolate brim of the treeless landscape.

"I'll have to drop you here, boys," said Neal, offering his hand once more to each in turn. "And say, it's done me more good than I can tell you, just to meet you fellows away over here. Seems as if I could smell Bridgeton air once more."

"Look us up whenever you're passing this

way, Neal," said Tom, warmly. "We'll always be glad to see you. And some day I'm going to try to get you an invitation to mess with us, if such things are permitted here. Don't forget now!"

"You take it from me I won't, boys," said the ambulance driver, who wore the highly prized decoration under his coat, instead of pinning it where every one could see it. "I've got something to look forward to now besides carrying wounded poillus to the hospitals in the rear. Wish you all the good luck going; and when you write home, boys, just mention meeting me, will you? So-long, fellows!"

CHAPTER XVII

WITH THE LAFAYETTE ESCADRILLE

"At last, Jack!"

With what gratification did Tom Raymond utter those word. The one dream of months past was about to be turned into reality. He was on the point of being received into the famous Lafayette Escadrille of fliers, composed of gallant young Americans who had volunteered to serve France in the name of liberty and democracy.

"It doesn't seem possible that we're looking on the camp of all those brilliant birdmen whose names have been in the dispatches from the fighting front these many months!" Jack murmured, half to himself, as he stared at the villa in which the Americans had taken up their quarters, and where they lived when not on duty.

"Let's move on, and introduce ourselves," suggested Tom.

They were naturally a little worried as to what their reception would be. They found however, that word had been sent to the head-

quarters of the escadrille concerning them, and Tom had been mentioned as a very promising pupil, whose astonishing ability in the pursuit he had taken up had pleased his French instructors at Pau.

So they were given a hearty greeting, truly American and democratic in every way.

As a rule the escadrille was supposed to number a round dozen members, though not always full, for significant reasons. Now it might be one of the aviators was taken sick after unusual exposure at a great height, where the cold was intense, and his place must remain empty for a while.

Then again, accidents were frequent, owing to the desperate chances taken when fighting the Boche fliers. Every man among them knew what it was to be wounded by a flying missile from a machine-gun; or possibly through being struck by shrapnel.

Last of all there came times when a vacancy occurred in the ranks, owing to one of the corps meeting the fate which they faced almost every day of their lives.

Neither of the two young fellows would ever forget that first dinner with the famous fliers of the escadrille, and the merry time they had afterwards. The conversation was of a diversified description. Indeed, almost every subject

was talked about save the one which must have lain closest to each heart there, that of dying.

That night Tom and Jack heard many thrilling deeds mentioned by one or another of those present. It was always some one else who had performed these, Tom noticed, and he admired the modesty that forbade any of them mentioning similar actions in which they themselves had borne a leading part.

One French pilot in connection with a bombing escadrille, where they use much heavier and more clumsy machines than the fighting Nieuports, was returning with comrades from a long flight into the enemy's country, when they were suddenly attacked by a number of German fighting planes.

What is known as an "incendiary" bullet pierced the gasolene reservoir of this particular pilot, and ignited the contents. The pilot instantly realized that he was doomed beyond any hope, and determined not to die alone, he turned his machine sharply about and dashed headlong straight for one of his pursuers.

Vainly did the German endeavor to avoid the contact. There was a sickening crash, and both machines, as well as the pilots, fell half a mile to the earth.

Another story that was told in a matter-of-fact way as though it might be only an account

of a daily occurrence, was of a pilot who chanced to find himself far over the enemy's country, and flying parallel with an important line of railroad.

As he continued on he overtook a crowded troop train going in the same general direction. Inspired by a spirit of mad adventure, and believing he had run across a splendid opportunity to strike a blow for his country, this French pilot darted low down, and commenced raking the train with his machine-gun until he had utterly exhausted the magazine.

Then, not yet satisfied, he caught up with the madly running engine, and shot both the driver and his firing assistant, using his revolver for this purpose. Just beyond there was a sharp turn, and the wildly running train, with no hand at the throttle of the engine, took this at full speed. It left the rails, and plunged into a ravine, where the cars were piled up in a heap, and hundreds of the troops killed.

Tom and Jack had a room given to them. It chanced to be empty just then, because of a sad tragedy that had taken place not long before their arrival, in which one of the brightest lights in the escadrille had gone out forever.

As both youths were very tired they slept well, though now and then a heavy burst of gunfire from a point not far removed aroused

them from their slumber. In time however they would become so accustomed to such things as to pay little attention to them. Those who live for days and weeks and months in almost constant contact with fighting armies by degrees get accustomed to almost any sort of noise.

Then came the morning that would ever be marked with a white stone in their memories. After breakfast, with some of the pilots, Tom and Jack prepared to witness the bustling scenes almost hourly taking place at the camp of the escadrille where the hangars were situated, and where most of the mechanicians and other workers are quartered, so they can look after the numerous machines.

The boys already knew that the pilots were not expected to do anything in connection with their machines save fly in them and fight, thus carrying out their perilous air service. They are the drivers, and there is a host of workers and mechanicians on hand ready to run the planes back into their hangars after the pilots have alighted, and to see that the machines are properly cleaned and have a full supply of petrol and oil; in fact do everything necessary to put them in first class condition for work.

Already several planes were in the air, bent on various missions. Here one had ventured over the enemy lines, and was circling high up,

daring a Boche pilot to ascend and give battle. Another was striving to get above several sausage observation balloons that were rising back of the German lines, hoping to be able to drop a bomb with telling effect on one of the group.

These things always bring about fierce fighting in the air, and hardly a day passes without a number of machines on either side being shot down, the fate of their human occupants sometimes never wholly known.

Tom had not forgotten one thing. In his pocket he was carrying a letter from his American instructor, Lieutenant Carson, to his younger brother, who was flying for France in some capacity. He learned however that Philip Carson was not just then connected with the Lafayette Escadrille, though he was known to most of those who formed that corps.

Some time later on perhaps Tom might chance to run across Carson, for somehow Americans seemed to have a way of finding one another over there in France. Perhaps they were drawn together by a desire to chat in their own tongue; for but few of them could be said to be really proficient in the French language.

A score of things interested the boys from the start. As they as yet had no planes of

their own they were privileged to roam about, and make numerous delightful discoveries. Later on they would be sent up with one of the other pilots, perhaps to take photographs of the enemy country back of the lines.

For this purpose a heavier machine than the Nieuport was always used, which went by the name of Caudron. This plane, being a two-seater, was frequently utilized to carry a spy far back of the German lines, where he could be dropped, to be called for at a specified time later on, after he had collected his information.

When one of these heavy planes went out on a reconnaissance it was equipped with a complete though small wireless outfit. Besides this Tom found—something that for some reason he had not before known—that a number of homing pigeons would be taken along, these to be released one by one as the pilot picked up news that he considered worth sending back in haste to the camp. Thus it might reach General Headquarters, and possibly prove of vast value in warding off a threatened attack.

Jack was most interested in the bombarding machines. These were of a peculiar build, and so fitted that they could take up a certain number of highly destructive bombs, carried underneath, where at the proper time each in turn

could be detached, to fall through space and do its appointed work.

He asked many questions of the grizzled sergeant whose acquaintance he made, and learned the method by which the raids were conducted on enemy munition dumps and concentration camps far back of the fighting front; or it might be, how a plan was carried out by means of which a deadly blow was struck at some fortified city hundreds of miles back in the Rhine country.

Tom was interested in the fighting planes. He noted the grimlooking little rapid-fire guns which they mounted, and touched the various parts with an almost reverent air. In truth the dream of his life was now close to being realized, and Tom was happy.

That particular day gave them their first view of battles in the air, and for that reason if no other, would never be forgotten.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOVERING OVER VERDUN

Days passed, and each brought new inspiration to the two chums, as they saw how those valiant members of the American squadron carried out their part in whatever was going on.

Through his excellent glasses Tom watched many fights aloft. It was a good education for the boys, since by this means they learned just how the proficient pilots manoeuvred under attack and in defence. They also had abundant opportunities of seeing this or that aviator execute the "grille" when threatened by a number of enemy planes that had fallen on him from the clouds overhead.

Each plane belonging to the Lafayette formation had an Indian head painted on the side. There was also the name of the pilot, or something to designate his identity, so that others in swift passing might know who handled the machine, for once in their "fighting togs" the men looked very much alike.

The French fighting planes on the other hand had red, white, and blue circles under the wings, and a distinctive insignia of the pilot on the sides.

The camp was many miles behind the battle line, but not so far as to entirely shut out the almost incessant roar that was taking place all day long. This consisted first of the explosion of great shells that threw up the earth like a geyser in Yellowstone Park does water and steam. Then came the steady rattle of the French 75's, for all the world like a snare-drum when mellowed in part by distance. Finally the deep-throated boom of the monster guns would cause the earth to quiver.

By degrees both of the boys were becoming accustomed to various things that in the beginning had filled them with awe. They could even witness a savage fight up in the air, and figure on what the two pilots would be apt to do next; for it was always a part of their education to put themselves in the place of the one who represented their side.

Then came the day when Tom was told to accompany the grizzled French sergeant up in a double-seated plane, to send back or relay information coming from some more advanced pilot who soared high above the German lines.

Both boys had been found very clever at signal work, and just then it chanced there was a shortage of observers and signal men, owing to an unusual number of accidents. Jack was sent up with another member of the French esca-

drille. It would be serving two purposes, since not only would the lack of observers be made good, but the experience would be of considerable value to the newcomers.

Jack was greatly excited at the prospect of at last flying for France, and also of looking down on the trenches of the Germans for the first time. Tom warned him to curb his enthusiasm lest it unfit him for the important work which he had undertaken to perform.

"You'll need your head every minute of the time, remember, Jack, if it's up to you to relay signals. Don't forget their importance. A mistake would cost the French dear, as an attack might be ordered on false information that would break down, and mean the loss of many brave men."

That sobered Jack.

"I guess you're right there, Tom," he remarked, as he completed his dressing for work, even to the muffler about his neck; for with winter still holding on to some extent, it would be bitterly cold far up toward the clouds.

All around them there was a deafening roar as motors were being tested, and machine-guns fired in trying them out, so as to make sure they were in perfect condition for instantaneous use. Since the life of the pilot often depends on the excellence of his artillery it is of the

utmost importance that the mitrailleuse is kept in order.

"Oil and gas!" they heard being bawled at many a mechanician by the eager pilots; the mechanics adjusting the gasolene and air throttles while the pilot gripped the propeller.

"Contact!" shrieked an attendant close to Tom, and the word was echoed by his pilot, who snapped on the switch, as the man spun the propeller. The motor took, the machine started forward out of line with the many others, raced more rapidly over the ground, and then took the air like a great bird. Jack had gone off with the Frenchman whom he was to accompany aloft.

There was no time to think of anything that had to do with sentiment. If fortune were kind the two chums expected to meet again later in the day, to compare notes as to their various experiences.

Now Tom's sergeant signaled to him to get seated, while he himself looked to the few last things that were necessary. In another three minutes he had given his mechanician the word, and Tom had followed Jack into the air.

The ascent was easily accomplished, and Tom Raymond quickly saw that there was a master hand at the wheel. The veteran pilot had been almost constantly at the work of handling a

heavy machine since the first year of the great war. He had had many narrow escapes from death, but for all that he never took unnecessary chances under the conviction that he bore a charmed life.

Circling upward they finally reached an altitude of about five thousand feet. Tom knew this partly from intuition, and then again he could see the face of the altimeter used to register height. After that for ten minutes they flew almost directly north.

Then the sergeant throttled down to await the coming of other machines that were expected to take some part in the venture. Tom busied himself in looking down upon the region of Verdun—a name ever to be inscribed on the pages of French history as commemorating deeds of unequaled valor on the part of her heroic sons.

The country could not be distinguished in detail from such a height. It presented a flat surface of varicolored figures. The woods were irregular blocks, dun-colored, with patches of dark green where evergreen trees grew; the roads could be traced running this way and that in white lines, often crossing. Fields were in geometric squares, and at another season of the year might have looked green.

Over beyond lay the Meuse, sparkling in the

sunlight. Far below hung a double line of the irregular sausage-shaped observation balloons, each secured by rope to a giant windlass by means of which they were raised and lowered readily.

Verdun lay just beyond, with its many red-tiled houses; though here and there could be seen an appalling gap, indicating where a great shell had caused devastation in the midst of the buildings.

Using his powerful binoculars Tom was able to note a multitude of what seemed tiny pock-marks dotting the landscape all around Verdun. These he knew must be what they called "shell-craters," being the vast excavations caused by the explosion of shells hurled from the monster guns of the Germans, placed, it may have been, twenty miles distant at the time.

Once across the Meuse, Tom saw a broad brown band running from the Woevre plain westward to the "S" bend of the river; and on the left bank of the Meuse it kept on until it reached the Argonne Forest.

Well he knew that many months back that country had been made up of a myriad of peaceful farms and villages. Now it was a blackened waste, a sinister belt that as one writer describes it "seems like a strip of murdered Nature, and to belong to another world."

"Why, even the roads have all been obliterated," Tom was telling himself, as he looked, overcome with a feeling of horror.

Every sign of humanity had been swept away; roads and woods were gone utterly; and where the restful French villages once nestled, nothing could be seen but gray smears where stone walls had tumbled together.

Still further along he discerned Fort Vaux and Fort Douaumont, scenes of desperate fighting when the great German forward movement had reached this pinnacle, but not fated to remain always in the hands of the invaders—not while Frenchmen lived to clutch their weapons and say: "They shall not pass!"

Still further they sailed.

Now Tom could see the uneven lines that marked the trenches of the enemy, though as a rule these were so well hidden under "camouflage" that it required a practiced eye to pick their location out.

Columns of muddy smoke spurting up here and there told where high explosives were still tearing further into this area. All this and much more Tom saw on that first visit of his to the upper currents above the long fiercely contested field of Verdun where the German Crown Prince had seemed ready to sacrifice a million men if necessary, in order to attain the object he had in view.

Then from the actions of his pilot, Tom knew they had reached their station, so that from that time forth they must occupy themselves strictly with the business, for the carrying out of which they had been sent forward.

"I've got to do my part now," thought Tom, grimly. "If I don't my flying for France will be a failure."

CHAPTER XIX

THE BATTLE BELOW

Tom Raymond was now about to have a part in a genuine battle. Even though he might be thousands of feet above the actual fighting, there was an important mission for him to perform, since he would be relaying signals from the advanced plane over the enemy lines. On the accuracy of these reports might hinge the success or failure of the attack.

The constant roar of their motor, and the high altitude at which they were working, would prevent his hearing much of what was taking place below. Still his eyes could take note from time to time of numerous interesting things likely to happen.

He could see the waves of French troops advancing behind the barrage fire put up by their batteries, and which was undoubtedly being gradually "lifted" the further they went toward the enemy lines.

Meanwhile every big gun belonging to the French had been battering the trenches of the Germans until they had the occupants cower-

ing as far down in the earth as they could get.

Nor were the German guns idle all this while. Far-away they lay in their coverts, hidden from the view of passing aviators by a generous use of tree branches and painted canvas. Monster shells were passing through the air at all times, and at great altitudes, since they were meant to fall miles and miles distant.

We-ee!

"Great Scott! What's that?" yelled Tom, but without being heard.

It was one of the great shells whistling past the plane in which Tom and the grizzled sergeant were seated. It came so close to them that the machine rocked violently. Tom felt cold at the thought of what would have happened had it by some mischance actually struck their plane.

"Some escape!" murmured the young aviator.

Here and there far down below him he saw spurts of flame bursting out from behind what he knew to be woods. Here there must be batteries in hiding, now taking part in deluging the German front with a hurricane of iron.

Meanwhile that wave of Frenchmen, their overcoats with the fronts fastened back so as to leave their knees clear, kept on advancing steadily. They would arrive at the enemy trenches presently, when those in hiding would

make their presence felt with innumerable quick-firing guns and trench bombs in the endeavor to eject the invaders.

There they would either die, or else surrender, because flight had been made utterly impossible. The barrage had been lifted, and covered a line just beyond the German first trenches. To pass through this hail of fire and live was out of the question, so that the German defenders were in a trap.

All this while Tom had been kept fairly busy. His pilot managed the plane adroitly so as to afford the observer an excellent chance to receive and send signals. Tom kept his glass fixed on the plane far ahead, from which his messages came. He did not know all they stood for; that was not his business. His duty was to send them on exactly as they were received.

There were times between, however, when he could glance earthwards, and see something of the awful events taking place on that blood-soaked field of Verdun. The French were now over the top of the German trenches, and engaged in clearing them of the enemy, even as so many industrious terriers might hunt rats in cellars where all the holes had been previously stopped up.

For hours this went on. The Germans flung

their waves of gray-coated fighting men recklessly against the seized trenches, now bristling with machine-guns turned the other way. They must have lost frightfully in the three separate attempts they made to reconquer the ground lost earlier in the day; but the French would not give up what they had taken.

All this while Tom realized that there was a certain amount of danger hovering over his head and that of his veteran comrade. Fokker machines and Aviatiks also, manned by daring Teuton pilots, arose to give battle to the venturesome French and Americans. Sometimes there would be a number of desperate engagements going on at the same time.

This was not all. The Germans of course understood how the facts concerning their movements was being taken note of, and the report sent back to French headquarters. They could even pick out the identical plane that was engaged in this service, and also the second machine doing relay work.

Again and again during the course of those hours teeming with thrilling happenings did they attempt to put these two important machines out of business by making an attack on them in force.

But the watchful pilots aboard the fighting planes of the French were not to be caught

napping or unmindful of their duty. The Nieuports were doing "ceiling work," far up toward the clouds; and no sooner was an enemy seen making for one of the observation planes than down would swoop a number of these sentinels, barring his progress, and forcing him either to fight or drop back to earth again.

It chanced that Tom's first flight for France was not to pass without an additional thrill. This came along later in the day, when they had been at work for some hours.

The defending Nieuports were engaged in a fierce battle with a force of enemy pilots who kept them busy circling around the advanced observation plane, when suddenly Tom became aware of the fact that a Fokker machine had managed to rise from another part of the German front, and was about to attack them.

No doubt it was all a part of a cleverly-laid scheme. While those enemy pilots kept the defenders busily engaged this fighting machine hoped to steal up on the second observation plane, and shower pilot and attendant with lead, so as to put them out of business.

Tom shouted something at his companion, and then began the first real air battle in the experience of the American novice. The grizzled old veteran kept the nose of his big plane

pointed straight at the oncoming enemy, so that Tom had only to begin firing when they were close enough, and rushing madly at each other.

He knew the deadly missiles must be cutting the air all around, but somehow this fact did not seem to disturb him at all; for he continued to work his rapid-fire gun with amazing zeal.

Then suddenly he saw that the German Fokker was starting to descend. A shell from his rapid-fire gun had either struck the pilot and wounded him severely, or else part of the working gear had been put out of order.

At any rate the fight was over, and had ended in their favor. No wonder Tom Raymond felt a strange feeling rush over him as thrusting his head far out he watched the stricken enemy craft circling below. Now it went swiftly volplaning, and again resisting the downward rush with outspread wings, just as Tom had seen an eagle coming from the clouds in chase of a fish-hawk that was trying to elude his attack, and save his finny prize.

It was the fever of a first victory that fired Tom's blood. He hoped that it was a good sign of future work in the interest of France. Then putting the recent exciting incident out of mind he once more turned his attention to the signals that were again coming from the ad-

vanced observation plane far ahead. The bustling little Nieuport that came rushing to assist them arrived after all was over.

Taken altogether, that day gave Tom Raymond a better insight concerning the duties of an aviation pilot in war-time than all the instruction he had received in a school.

Finally it was noted that another observer had taken the place of the plane from which their signals had been coming. That meant a relief operator had arrived to allow the tired pair a chance to secure much-needed rest.

Tom himself was not sorry to discover that they too were about to give way to another plane that was arising toward them. As it drew closer, and it became possible for the pilots to wave a few signals to each other, Tom saw the observer in the relieving plane make a familiar movement with his hand. Since that was an old signal practiced between Jack and himself he knew who the bundled-up figure in the observer's seat was.

He made no attempt at conversation, because the roar of the motors and other sounds went to make up a Bedlam of noise and it was next to impossible to make himself heard.

So waving Jack farewell, Tom again turned his attention to the battlefield below him for a last view before they descended to the hangar

field, their work successfully accomplished for that day.

The landing was made without a hitch. Tom immediately became aware of the fact that there was a most terrible din going on all around him. Up to that moment he had almost been unacquainted with the fact, because his own motor kept up such an incessant noise close to his ears.

"Tired though he certainly was, the young aviator could not think of seeking rest. He managed to get a bite to eat, for he was very hungry after his frigid experience aloft. Then with his glasses betook himself to a convenient place of observation, from which he could watch much that was going on, particularly in the regions above.

But the Teutons had virtually given up all attempts to fight for air supremacy on that particular day. They had been sadly outnumbered and outclassed in most of the fights by the British, French and American fliers with whom they had found themselves faced.

Of course the story was not all onesided. There had been times when it was the Boche flier that proved to be the more skillful; and several French pilots had been dropped. One of these had fallen in the open space between the hostile lines. He was only wounded it

was seen, and desperate attempts were made by his comrades to sally out and rescue him.

Three times did this happen, only to have the German guns open on them with telling effect. Dozens of men had fallen solely through their desire to save the gallant air pilot. Twice did Teutons venture forth with the evident intention of making him a prisoner, only to recoil before the blast of deadly machine-gun fire that blazed forth in their faces.

Finally the Germans, as if furious at their losses, turned their machine-guns on the wreckage of the French plane, and fairly riddled both machine and pilot with balls.

Of course Tom easily picked out the big observation Caudron in which, as he knew, Jack was doing duty just then. Once he thought something serious had happened to it when he saw the plane rock violently, as if about to collapse; but it immediately righted again. Tom guessed it was one of those high explosive shells that were still coming periodically from the Teuton rear that had passed so close as to cause the motion.

His heart had jumped into his throat with a sudden fear, lest Jack's initial experience in hovering above a battlefield be also his last. Then he felt a wave of relief pass over him when he saw that the danger had passed; for

the observation plane was moving majestically onward as before, and just as steadily.

As the afternoon waned the battle gradually ceased. The Germans had found out that their foes were of a mind to hold on to their recent gains with a death-grip that nothing could shake off. The French had taken their second wind, so to speak and were once more "in the running."

Then Jack and his companion came down again, making a safe landing. Tom was on hand to greet his chum as the latter rather unsteadily alighted; for being up in a rocking plane for hours is apt to make any one feel a bit "groggy."

"Well, how did you like it?" was Tom's first question.

There was hardly any need of it, for with the removal of the muffler and the goggles that adorned the close-fitting aviator's hood, worn when making an ascent near the clouds, it could be seen that Jack's face was radiant, while his eyes fairly sparkled with enthusiasm.

"Oh, it was great!" he exclaimed, as he fell upon Tom, and almost hugged him.

Having made their way from the camp of the hangars to the villa and changed their working clothes for something better suited to lounging about, the two chums went on to compare notes.

It was found that in many things they had had just the same experience.

"Well," said Jack, about the time the sun sank and the shadows began to creep over the wretched landscape, "I've had my initial bow to aerial warfare, and I want to say right now I'm more infatuated with it than ever. Some day we'll go up together, I trust, Tom, and I hope it will be soon."

CHAPTER XX

BEHIND THE FRENCH LINES

After that wonderful day the two air service boys saw no more of real action for some little time. The French had achieved the main object they had in view. They were once more in possession of a further strip of the enemy trenches, and had held tenaciously to them despite all fierce counter-attacks.

This meant that still more precious French territory had been redeemed, even though to regain it it had virtually to be baptized with the blood of patriots and martyrs.

Tom and Jack heard a good deal of this talk as they met with the French officers who occasionally strolled over to the headquarters of the Lafayette Escadrille. It was not said with boasting, but was said proudly. Those heroic men who had laid their lives on the altar of their country's freedom would never be forgotten so long as France lived.

The boys wandered about considerably behind the French front when there was nothing afoot. They found much to excite their keen

interest. It was, in the first place, perfectly amazing, as well as appalling, to see what a desert that once fair land had become, after the tidal wave of modern warfare had swept across it.

"Why!" Jack was wont to exclaim, "it must be heaps worse than the Sahara; for there the sand always was and always will be, while here there once nestled lovely little French villages, and every bit of the ground, they tell us, was taken up with gardens, fields and orchards."

"Yes, everything is gone," Tom would continue, looking around at the desolate picture, with some crows the only living thing in sight. Now, let's talk of something more cheerful."

"About—well, Bessie, for instance?" suggested Jack, with a sly grin.

Tom had to laugh at his chum's way of bringing the subject around to something he had evidently been thinking about lately.

"You're still wondering whether you'll ever run across that pretty little Gleason girl, I see," he remarked.

"Well, I took quite an interest in her, as you happen to know," admitted Jack candidly. "But it was partly on account of her having such a hard time of it with that guardian of her's. I didn't like Potzfeldt's looks for a red

cent; and from certain things Bessie dropped I hang to the belief that he has some dark scheme up his sleeve, which will sooner or later involve the girl."

"Well, of course we couldn't do anything when on shipboard to try to take her away from him," said Tom. "Bessie told you he was her legally appointed guardian, so far as she knew; and was moreover some sort of relative—an uncle by marriage, or a second cousin of her mother's. I don't remember what."

"I can't just explain it, Tom, but somehow I feel it in my bones that one of these fine days I'm fated to come across that pair again."

"Well, if, as we believe, Mr. Potzfeld was trying to get into Germany some way or other," chuckled Tom, "that may mean you'll meet Bessie as a prisoner of war. From all we've heard about the way the Germans are treating their prisoners you're facing a dismal outlook, my boy. I prophesy that you'll look a whole lot thinner after you've been fed on black bread and water for three months."

"Say, Tom, what about Adolph Tuessig and your father's stolen paper?" went on Jack, after a pause.

"I don't know," was the reply and Tom heaved a sigh. "I wish I *could* learn something—for dad's sake."

So they chatted as they walked, and observed all that was to be seen around them, showing the horrors of modern warfare.

All the same the two young aviators had their busy times. These strolls were only allowable when the weather was bad for flying, and a period of dullness descended on the enterprising escadrille. It might be the fog was too heavy, or else a driving wind made flying too full of peril to send up many machines.

On other occasions the chums took part in numerous tasks. Each in turn served as photographer, accompanying a pilot over the German lines, guarded by a flotilla of fighting planes that hovered above them in a fashion to make Jack compare the situation to an old hen and her chickens.

"Only in this case," he hastily added, "it's the nimble little chicks that are watching over the clumsy old hen, so as to keep the German hawks from making a meal off her."

Whatever they attempted to do was done well. Many times did they receive a word of commendation from the French commander on that sector, when he had seen the splendid fruits of their snapshots; for both youths were expert photographers.

They had now been in almost every type of machine along the front. Even the small and

active Nieuport had been used with satisfactory results, though of course both of them had served aboard one at Pau, and knew how to handle such a plane perfectly.

On his part Tom often found his thoughts roving to the subject of his father's recent loss, and wondering if the fortunes of war would ever again bring him in contact with the treacherous Adolph Tuessig.

He would sit while taking a sun-bath, and allow his fancy to imagine a meeting with the thief somewhere, perhaps even far back of the German lines.

"Wouldn't it be just grand," Tom would tell himself at such times, "if only I could swoop down on him like that hawk Jack was speaking about, and carry the rascal back to the French lines with me? Then I'd soon learn if, as I sometimes find myself hoping, Adolph Tuessig still carries that precious paper on his person."

It seemed like a wild and improbable dream, that could never come true. Even the sanguine Tom admitted to himself that there was hardly one chance in a thousand of such a meeting taking place. Still, strange things sometimes happen.

One night they learned that a squadron of "bombers" was scheduled to set out long be-

fore daylight. Their destination was a certain German city where it was known heavy reserves of troops, lately drawn from the Russian front, were being held until they were needed to take the place of war-weary men who had been fighting for long weeks day after day, and would soon need a rest.

"I wish we were going along with the boys," sighed Jack, as they planned to stay up and watch the departure in the moonlight. "I'd like to say I'd been off on one of those raids we've heard so much about. The fact is, Tom, so far I haven't had a first chance to bring down an enemy machine, or even engage in a serious fight."

"Well, if we did go," his chum told him, "I hardly think it would be in Nieuport fighting planes. We're still lacking a little in skill and experience."

"But we could manage a heavy Caudron, you know, and already we've learned how to manipulate the bombs that are to be cut loose. Besides, it would be mighty fine for us to be together, Tom. I'm getting a bit tired of trying to talk with a jolly Frenchman who can't manage much United States, while I'm a pretty lame duck with my French."

Tom smiled. He too felt the same way, and would have liked nothing better than an oppor-

tunity to go up with his comrade. Not for the sake of talking, however, since it is next to impossible to hold any connected conversation in the air while the motor is droning, or thumping madly, so close to one's ears, and with their warm hoods covering a good portion of the head.

"Perhaps another time, Jack, we may manage to go along," he told the drooping one. "I mean to speak to the captain about it. He has considerable influence at aviation headquarters, you know, and may be able to put in a good word for us. As you say it would be experience for us both; and we want to learn everything there is to know about this game."

"Well, don't forget, and speak soon. I understand they mean to push this bombing business for a while now, in the hope of breaking up certain big plans they've learned the Crown Prince is thinking of putting through."

They waited up to see the bombarding unit depart in the moonlight. This came to pass about eleven o'clock that night, so as to have the full benefit of the moon. They had a long journey ahead of them, and the machines were slow and cumbersome when compared to the fleet Nieuports.

Each machine, the chums noticed, carried two men, the pilot and the observer. The lat-

ter's duties were especially to release the deadly bombs that were strung under the frame, when the proper time arrived. He was also in position to use the rapid-fire gun with which each plane was armed.

After the squadron had vanished the boys stood and listened to the sounds growing fainter in the distance. Some shooting followed, the Germans trying to pot them as they crossed over the lines, but without success, since they had already attained considerable altitude, and the firing was done at random.

Perhaps in the gray of early dawn they would return to the camp, the men tired, and almost frozen; but with glowing accounts of the immense damage they had managed to inflict on the concentration camps of the enemy.

Such is the life of an army aviator in war times.

CHAPTER XXI

OFF WITH A BOMBING UNIT

"I'm bringing you good news, Jack!"

It was just two days after Jack had expressed himself as "just dying for active service of some sort," that Tom burst in upon him with these words.

Jack was finishing dressing for an ascent, as he had been detailed to accompany the grizzled old sergeant on a little observation trip. He looked up with a glad light on his now tanned face.

"A letter from mother, is it?" he demanded, extending his hand.

"Mail isn't in yet for to-day" the other told him. "Guess again."

"You don't mean to tell me you've met Bessie—Oh, shucks! that would be an impossibility, seeing that this is the fighting front, where no women save Red Cross nurses are allowed to visit. Then it must be we're to accompany the next bombing raiders who are starting out!"

"Your last shot struck the target plumb center, Jack!"

"Bully for that!" ejaculated the other, immediately commencing to cut a few pigeon wings in the exuberance of his joy. "Now we'll have a break in the dull monotony, won't we, Tom?"

"I hope that may be the only break we will have," he was told. "Yes. I was called over to the General's headquarters, and he imformed me that our captain had spoken a good word for us. He also assured me we really deserved some favor on account of the good work we had been doing ever since coming to the front."

"Then we're really going, are we?"

"As sure as anything can be in these queer times."

"When does it come off?" pursued the impatient Jack. "I hope right away, because I'll be counting the hours, yes, even the minutes, until we're shooting off over the lines of the Crown Prince, and headed, perhaps for Berlin."

Tom laughed.

"Oh! I don't believe for a minute they're thinking of any such big game as that. This is going to be much nearer home."

"But there was a fellow, a Frenchman, in the bargain, who did drop a bomb on old Berlin not so very long ago, Tom," expostulated Jack earnestly.

"Not a bomb," the other informed him. "It was some sort of placard, telling the German people that a live French aviator had succeeded in reaching their capital. He was on his way to the Russian front, where I believe he finally succeeded in landing. It was partly to send dispatches across country; but more in the line of bravado. They wished to let those smug Berlinese know that their old capital wasn't so isolated, as they had been believing."

"Huh!" grunted Jack, "I've always said that if Berlin could be bombed just as Paris and London have been, all that stuff would stop. But when do we go?"

"To-night!"

"And our objective?"

"We are bound up the Rhine to drop some tons of high explosives on munition factories that have been turning out a tremendous amount of supplies for the Crown Prince's army here at Verdun. The French commander believes that if only we can score some big hits there, it will cripple the assault that is preparing."

Jack heaved a sigh of relief.

"I'm glad to hear that. Of course I'm enlisted in this war, to see it through, whether Uncle Sam later on gets into the mess or not, but I'd hate to know that I had to drop those terrible bombs on a sleeping German town,

where peaceful and innocent people would likely be the ones to suffer most."

"That's just why the British keep on refusing to pay back each raid on London. They have their faults, we know, but somehow there's a spirit of national pride about their love of a square game. They fight fairly and stubbornly, those British. The Germans once made all manner of fun of them, but they have a deep respect for both the French and British these days. It's been pounded into them with hard knocks."

It was then afternoon. Jack considered, and then came to a decision.

"Guess I'll have to call my appointment with Sergeant Jean off for to-day," he said, as he commenced to change his clothes again. "With such a long and tiresome trip ahead I'd better save myself all I can."

The night promised to favor them, a fact Jack rejoiced to see, for he kept fearing lest something should crop up to cause the general to call the expedition off.

"The moon is nearly at its full, Tom," he remarked, as they waited to hear the ever welcome summons to supper; "and while it may be a bit hazy, as it was night before last at the time they started, that will only be in our favor. I guess we'll get away all right."

"There's not a doubt about it," he was assured by Tom, who had not allowed himself to worry about that in the least. "By the way, I saw the old sergeant gripping your hand as you came away. He took it in the right spirit, of course, when you told him why you had to beg off?"

"Oh, yes. And, Tom, he's to be one of the party. Think of his going up this afternoon, just as if it was all in the day's work; when to-night he'll have to be in his plane for many hours, and cruise far up the Rhine and back."

"He's a hardened old vet!" laughed Tom. "Was he wishing you good luck, Jack?"

"Sure thing. He also told me to say this to you: 'Success on this trip will be the making of you as a warplane pilot.' And I guess it will put us in line for promotion besides. Before long we may take our place with the rest of the boys, and frequently meet a Boche in combat away up near the clouds."

Nothing was said at the supper-table about the bombing trip, so Jack reasoned that it had not been scattered broadcast. But Tom decided that others besides their captain might be told, as the secret would certainly not be passed on. One and all were glad that a chance had finally come for Jack and Tom to do "something worth while," knowing how

they had been lamenting the enforced idleness.

Of course a bombing raid was "tame stuff" to those active members of the fighting escadrille. Aboard one of those heavy and cumbersome big machines, that made such slow progress compared with the speedy Nieuports, going a couple of hundred miles in a night, dumping the load of explosives on some object far below, and then returning to their base, was a mere matter of form. The danger connected with such an expedition could not for a moment be compared with what the fighting pilots risked every day they went up to perform their hazardous duties.

Nevertheless they did not by any means, scorn those who carried out the raiding expeditions. Their work was just as important, if not so exciting, as any other, since every munition dump, or factory, which they could successfully fire, meant hundreds of French lives saved in the end.

As there was to be no rest for them later in the night the chums retired to their room very early and lay down to snatch a few hours sleep. Tom had an alarm clock and set it so as to be sure they would awake on time.

It turned out that Tom was even better than the clock; or else that he was afraid to risk it, for he had shaken his companion, and told him

to get up, before the alarm went off. Tom stifled the clock under the bed clothes, so as to prevent its noise from arousing the rest of the unit, by this time enjoying their initial sleep of the night.

When they got outside, however, they found a number of their fellows bent on riding over to the camp hangars, to see them fairly on their way. They made the short trip by means of a big car, one of many that had been commandeered for the service of the Americans and a few other aviators near by.

The busy mechanicians had the machines in line, and all tuned up for the trip, even to the bombs adjusted beneath the body of each big plane. Already the French pilots were around, and seeing that everything was in proper trim.

Every man was so bundled up that he might have passed unrecognized by his dearest friend so far as features went. Jack, however, had a means of identifying the old sergeant, and his last word of greeting received a buoyant reply that came straight from the heart, as Jean wished them *"bon voyage,* and a safe return my children;" that being a really French way of speaking, often used even by high commanders in addressing their armies.

After considerable delay from one cause and another, the word was given to start. In rapid

succession did the great planes commence their flight. Exceeding care had to be exercised on account of the terrible missiles they were carrying for an unfortunate collision might have caused immense damage.

"Some adventure, believe me!" was Jack's comment.

"You bet!" returned Tom, laconically.

Presently Tom and Jack found themselves mounting upward in spirals, and following the tail-light of the plane that was to serve them as a pilot.

CHAPTER XXII

WRECKING A MUNITION PLANT

HIGHER they went, since it was necessary that they pass over the German lines at an altitude such as would insure them safety from any furious burst of shrapnel fire from the watchful enemy below.

Had it been a dark night doubtless numberless searchlights would have been brought into play, striving to pick out the machines whose drumming reached the ears of the wakeful enemy below. But when the moon reigned in the heavens it was useless to depend on such artificial light.

Finally Tom saw they had reached the altitude agreed on as the working basis. He could detect ahead of him one or more of the big planes taking flight toward the north. There lay the land of the Teuton, as yet wholly free from invasion, save through just such desperate means as this night expedition.

Far below they could see a myriad of dots of lights. These might be the fires of the hostile armies, for the weather still remained

cold. In the nights particularly a blaze was acceptable to such of the fighting men as had to remain out of the trenches and back of the lines.

Tom could also see colored lights, which he guessed were rockets. The Germans were sending up signals. He wondered if their starting out was known, or suspected, and whether some sort of bombardment was in store for the raiders as they passed over the Teuton front.

After the recent raid that was said to have been so very successful it seemed reasonable to believe that the German High Command would expect a repetition while the moon still gave a favorable light.

Tom quickly learned that his guess had been a good one. From below came a jumble of sounds faintly heard, along with the regular pulsations of his powerful motor. Then just under them shrapnel began to burst in great quantities. But the French knew just how high the enemy anti-aircraft guns were capable of sending their missiles, for seldom did a shell come dangerously close to the raiding machines.

They were just out of range, and that peril seemed to be put at rest. Presently, from the indications, they knew they were beyond the

hostile lines, and doubtless passing over the country that lay between Verdun and the border of Lorraine.

In the lead was the head pilot, a man who possessed a wonderful ability to take an expedition like this out, find his objective, perhaps one hundred and fifty miles away, and come back, after dropping tons of high explosives.

Those who followed were strung out in two diverging lines, just as wild geese always fly, forming the letter V. In moving in this formation the danger of collision was more or less done away with. Besides, every pilot knew just where his location in the line was, and could keep watch of those ahead, while looking for the signals agreed upon.

All communications had to be carried on with flares, since sounds were utterly out of the question. As a rule it was the duty of the observer to discover such signals, and pass them on to the rear unless, as in the case of the two chums, they brought up the line, being the very last unit of the eleven machines in the bombing squadron.

Now and then the moon would hide behind banks of fleecy clouds, but only to reappear again a little later, to shine with undiminished light. Jack wondered whether a storm might come along while they were aloft. He had

been in several small flurries of the kind, but that was in the broad light of day. To be caught when on a night journey would be a new experience for both of them.

After a while he made out that they were now above some river, and had apparently altered their course, as if the pilot meant to follow the stream.

Jack was not puzzled at all by this fact. In company with his chum he had studied a chart of the country of Lorraine and the Rhine district beyond. He knew that the Mosel River flowed in an almost northeasterly direction, with numerous bends, to empty finally into the Rhine on the border of Hessen Nassau, one of the German provinces.

When presently they glimpsed many lights below Jack knew they were passing over the fortified city of Metz, once a French possession, but taken by Germany, just as Strassburg in Alsace had also been taken when they won the war in 1870.

"They must have been great war times too," he reasoned. "But not as bad as now, not by a long shot!"

Still the raiders kept steadily on. They were fired at frequently, but without being injured, since they maintained their safe altitude.

Another glow of lights, much modified, told

them where Treves lay. Jack understood that they had passed beyond the line of the captured province of Lorraine, and were speeding above genuine German territory. It gave him something akin to satisfaction to know that no matter where they dropped those big bombs now they were bound to do damage more or less to the enemy country.

Still they moved forward. The head pilot changed the course as frequently as he saw fit, but often they were out of sight of the twisting river below; though a little later on they would again cross it.

An hour passed. Jack figured that possibly they had covered a distance approximately seventy miles. When another thirty minutes had gone he believed that they would be at the junction of the Mosel with the world-famous Rhine. Here stands a typical German city, Ehrenbreitstein. He was eager to glimpse the lights of this place, because it would indicate that two-thirds of their dash into the heart of Germany had been successfully accomplished.

In due time all this came about, and as the two air service boys looked far down they could just manage to discover the gleaming silver thread which they knew must be the Rhine. of which they had read and heard so much.

At this point their course took an abrupt change. Up to then the general direction had been due northeast, but now it headed toward the north. They were still passing over Rhenish Prussia, where, as they knew, a regular bee-hive of industries connected with war work was located. Indeed, there were few parts of Germany at that time where the population, such as had been left when the able men went to the front, was not engaged in making munitions, or some industry connected with the successful carrying out of the war.

Soon Jack caught the signal that told him they were now on the border of the busy bee-hive where no work but that on army contracts was being done. Far below them lay the great buildings given up to such purposes, and which it must be their aim to try to destroy.

Besides the high explosives intended to shatter walls and wreck buildings when they fell, the raiders also carried a supply of lighter missiles. These were meant to scatter liquid fire broadcast, and start innumerable conflagrations that it would be impossible for human skill to extinguish. Thus they took pattern of the German fire-bombs which had so often been rained down on London.

Suddenly began a most remarkable exhibition of bombardment, with those immense bat-like

planes hovering far above the munition plant and discharging their terrible freight as fast as they could find themselves at the proper angle to insure a possible hit.

Bang! Boom! Bang!

While the explosions came but faintly to the ears of those a mile above, the observers saw most thrilling things taking place below them.

There were fires blazing in half a dozen different sections. These sufficed to light up the entire plant, so that the remainder of the bombs could be let loose with greater accuracy, and accomplish still more damage.

Tom continued to guide the plane, following the one ahead in ever widening circles.

On his part Jack kept releasing such of the bombs as had not been let go. While unable to more than surmise where these landed, still the youth felt confident that they had given a good account of themselves.

At last it was over, and the "home" signal was given. Both young aviators were more than glad to see it, for they had become fairly sickened with the sight below, and with realizing what a terrible panic must prevail among the workers in the raided munition works.

The return voyage was started. Things went well for some time and then there came a change. The breeze increased and made it much more difficult to keep up the regular for-

mation. Suddenly the plane which was serving Jack as a guide seemed to be swallowed up in a cloud, for he could no longer discern it ahead.

"Gee, that's strange!" he muttered. "What became of it?"

As they had not ascended it became apparent that the clouds were scurrying along at a much lower level than before. This seemed to indicate that a storm was gathering in the levels closer to the earth.

Tom sent his machine higher, hoping to get above the clouds and perhaps find others of the raiding force. Not another airship was in sight, and even in this higher level the clouds gathered about them.

The two air service boys were lost in the upper air currents.

CHAPTER XXIII

LOST IN A SEA OF CLOUDS

When Tom Raymond realized that he and Jack were really separated from the rest of the squadron his first act was to throttle down his motor, that it might be possible for him to speak to his companion. If they were in actual danger it was better to share the responsibility, and not try to shoulder it all himself.

"We've lost the rest of the boys, Jack!" he yelled out.

"Yes, I noticed that," came the answer. "What can we do about it?"

"Only one thing that I can see. Have to go on by ourselves! But—" and the pilot paused significantly.

"That means steering by the compass," remarked the other.

"No other way, since I wouldn't know the conformation of the ground below, even if it were daylight and I could see fairly well. Why! what under the sun can this mean?"

"What?" demanded Jack, showing signs of excitement now, as he realized that his com-

panion was turning this way and that in evident dismay.

"I'm afraid we've met with a loss! I only hope it won't turn out to be a calamity!"

"Loss of what?" cried the observer. "Gas tank sprung a leak?"

"Perhaps it has for all I know, with all that shrapnel flying around us. But our compass is gone!"

"Gone!" shouted the astounded Jack.

"Just what it has!" Tom declared. "I don't see how it could have happened, for I had it as secure as ever it could be, right here where I could watch it if the time came for steering by the needle."

"Great guns! Look again! It may have been misplaced. And yet it was there as we started. I tested it to make sure it was correct. But how could we have lost our compass?"

"I can think of only one way. You remember when we found ourselves in that pocket, with shells bursting all around us?"

"Yes, of course. When we had to start up in a hurry to get out of range."

"It must have happened then," went on Tom disconsolately. "We were tossed about like a ship caught in a storm at sea. I called out to you to keep your seat firmly, though I don't

believe you heard me. In all that turmoil the compass must have been dislodged and dropped."

"There's no use of crying over spilt milk," his companion called out. "The question to settle is what we ought to do now about steering."

"I'll do the best I can with the lumbering old plane," said the pilot bravely, not one to be utterly discouraged by conditions that promised trouble.

For some little time the air service boys continued on through the clouds which surrounded them like a milky envelope, and which prevented their seeing even the moon above. Then there came a change, and once more they found themselves in the open.

An hour had passed since they lost track of their companions. Tom steered by reckoning alone. He kept the moon on his right whenever he could see it through the masses of clouds drifting near.

Then came a sudden shock as he discovered moving objects ahead that quickly took on the shape of cruising planes. There were three of them, all fashioned alike; and even as seen in the deceptive light of the declining moon Tom knew they could not be French machines.

In the first place, they were coming toward him, though possibly the pilots had not yet

discovered the presence of the heavy bombing machine near by. Then again, these planes were of a lighter build, and capable of much greater speed than the big two-seated Caudron.

Of course they were German Fokkers, sent up to intercept the returning expedition.

"Looks as if we were in for it," thought Tom. "Three of 'em, too!"

To fight those three experienced airmen at that dizzy height was hopeless, although if it became the last resort Tom and Jack would undoubtedly resort to the rapid-fire gun and try to stand them off.

It was a time for quick thinking and instant action; and no sooner had Tom made his alarming discovery than he changed his course and headed directly for a bank of clouds that chanced to be close by.

Once enveloped in the cloud, there was little chance of their running into the enemy except through sheer accident. To avoid this Tom quickly altered his course, suiting his action to the meager knowledge he possessed of the dimensions of the cloud-belt into which he had so recklessly plunged.

It would be much like searching a haystack for a lost needle, he believed, and that the three Germans could only scatter, and grope their way along. He hoped they might chance to collide in the cloud pack, and have all pos-

sible trouble, even to spattering one another with a hail of missiles from their mounted guns.

This was all very well, but Tom did not like the situation at all. He could not tell which way he was heading, since all view was cut off, and the loss of the compass badly felt.

Consequently they might be actually going back into the heart of the hostile country for all they knew, with a pretty good chance of being made prisoners of war.

More time passed. Unable to stand it any longer Tom decided to drop down to a lower level, and try to get free from that stifling enveloping cloud that wrapped them in its dense folds. True, other perils might await them there, but it seemed the best move.

Both young aviators breathed easier when they finally left the cloud above them, and were once more able to see something besides that opaque mass around them. Far below they could catch faint glimpses of lights, as though they were passing over some town, or perhaps a railroad center where troops and supplies were being loaded for the fighting front.

But where were they? Tom confessed to himself that he could not tell. He again got the sinking moon on his right, so that he felt positive they must be headed in a direction generally

correct. Nevertheless, since he could not have told the Mosel River from any other, even if seen by daylight, there was a strong probability that although they were lucky, and finally reached the French lines, they might land fifty miles away from the aviation hangars of the Lafayette Escadrille.

Not that such a thing would give them much cause for anxiety, since news of their safe arrival would be flashed to their headquarters, to relieve the tension that was sure to result from their absence from the squadron. And later on they could ascend again, and make the home port easily enough.

It was while Tom was telling himself all this that he felt a movement on the part of his chum. This he recognized as the signal, and knew that Jack had something of importance to say, and wished him to ease up the pounding motor so he might be heard.

"Something else gone wrong, Tom!" called Jack.

"You've been testing our supply of gas, have you?" shouted the pilot. "Getting low, I suppose."

"It's been leaking in a trickling stream right along," came from the other in tones of deepest disgust. "I've found a tiny hole that must have been made by a splinter from shrapnel or

a bullet from that German pilot's gun. If only I'd thought to look before, we might have fixed it and saved a couple of gallons."

This was serious news indeed. With possibly fifty or seventy miles of hostile territory to cover, and daybreak close at hand, they were in a bad fix.

"How much have we still got?" asked Tom.

"Don't know, exactly, but hardly a gallon at the best; and still oozing out of that hole not as large as a shingle nail would make."

Quickly Tom reviewed the desperate situation in his mind. He knew they had no chance whatever of making the French lines unless in some way they managed to renew their supply of gasolene or petrol. That, of course, could only be done by landing, and commandeering a supply at some house where, by accident, the owner had a spare gallon or two.

Meanwhile they could possibly plug up the hole in the tank, and if through good luck they were enabled to rise again, finally get back of the French lines.

"Can you reach that hole in the tank, and keep your finger on it, Jack, so as to conserve our last gallon of fuel?" he called out.

"I guess I can. What are you going to do about it? One gallon won't take us all the way home."

"I wish it would, but I know better,'" was the reply. "Listen, Jack! We must keep moving along until dawn comes. Then, if the coast seems clear, we've got to drop down and make a landing."

"Oh! If we do that it's all up with us, and we'll be bound for a German prison camp on our first outing trip."

"I hope not," the pilot replied instantly. "My object is to try to run across a supply of gasolene and commandeer it. It's a toss-up whether we can find any, with the country drained so well by the military authorities. It's also hit and miss whether we run smack into a bunch of Boches as soon as we land. But there seems to be no other way."

"Well, I haven't any better suggestion to offer, so go ahead. Give your orders, and I'll obey."

CHAPTER XXIV

IN GREAT LUCK

With wildly throbbing hearts both Tom and Jack peered downward as they once more resumed their voyage on a level. Dawn had come to the earth below. They could make out the character of the ground, and see a road which ran in a zigzag fashion. Tom noticed this in particular because it was probable that a house would be discovered close to a thoroughfare; and they must come upon such a place if they hoped to secure the necessary supply of gasolene.

It was a slender hope that was held out to them. Tom knew how precious the explosive liquid had become in all Germany and Austria, so that few if any private cars were running, the Government having commandeered every available gallon. Still, there might be a chance of their coming on some car, whether connected with the military forces or not, and transferring the contents of its tank to their own.

The country seemed none too thickly popu-

lated. There were patches of forest, too, something hard to find in Northern France, where for almost three years the ravages of modern warfare had told heavily on woods and orchards.

Tom changed his plans. Instead of looking for a house he meant to find a car either on that road or else laid up somewhere, from which they might get the gasolene so necessary for their deliverance.

Looking ahead he saw something moving. A second glance told him it was what he was most desirious of discovering. It was a car, and heading in the same general direction as themselves.

Tom instantly made up his mind that his course was clear. He would drop down with a rush, and chase after that fleeing car. It would be easy enough to overtake it, and perhaps if they used the rapid-fire gun a few rounds the driver would draw up and surrender.

No sooner had he conceived this rather desperate plan then he commenced once more to volplane toward the earth. He had a glimpse of a man's face thrust out from the side of the car, which had started on at wild speed, as if the driver realized that the monster plane was swooping particularly at him, with some object in view.

"Be ready to use the gun, Jack!" yelled the pilot. "When I give the sign fire at his rear tires if you can. That man has what we want, and we've just *got* to take it from him. Understand?"

"Sure!" shouted Jack, changing his position in order to be ready to carry out his orders.

The car was bouncing along the road at a mad rate, but this seemed nothing in comparison with the speed with which the plane came on. Tom slowed up when he believed they were close enough. He left the rest to his comrade, knowing full well that Jack had shown considerable proficiency in using the rapid-fire gun when they were training at the French military field, and while engaging that Boche pilot more recently.

It was not an easy target—that moving car, plunging from side to side of the winding road, partly through accident, or it might be from fear on the part of the driver that he was about to be bombarded.

Keeping his gun low enough not to spatter the upper part of the car, Jack fired. With the "chatter" of the gun the bullets commenced to splash like hail around the rear tires of the speeding car. Jack kept shooting low. He was in deadly fear lest by some mischance he puncture the petrol tank of the automobile. And

even though they wrecked the car of what avail would their victory be if in the end they found only an empty reservoir?

Tom could see ahead a short distance. He kept a keen lookout, for after they had stopped the car it would be necessary for them to make a successful landing; and he knew full well what difficulties must then confront him as the pilot. Any sort of accident, and it would be all over with them. Either they would be killed, or at the best find themselves prisoners of the Boches.

Jack now began to get his range better. All the while they were hovering about the height of an ordinary house above the fleeing car, and keeping somewhat in the rear. It was certainly the queerest pursuit that any one could well imagine, and no wonder the man who was trying his best to escape believed his last hour had come.

Then one of the missiles accomplished its work, and a tire went flat.

The car zigzagged worse than ever, and its speed was cut down. The pilot managed to guide the machine, however, and keep it on the road until the speed was very low; and then it went into the ditch with a crash.

The car was a wreck. As to the condition of the driver the air service boys at first knew

little, as they could only catch a fleeting glimpse of him as they shot past. But he seemed to be doubled up in the wreckage as though more or less severely injured.

Tom had seen the very place he needed for making his landing. It was an open field, and pasture land at that, so he hoped to find it fairly level.

Being accomplished at landing, Tom succeeded in bringing the big Caudron down without the slightest accident. Then both young aviators jumped out, though Jack immediately fell forward on his face, his cramped limbs doubling up under him.

"We must hurry!" Tom cried, even while running back toward the stalled car. "Someone may come along the road, perhaps troops in the bargain, and then we would be in a fine pickle."

"Do you think he was killed, Tom?" gasped Jack, a bit awed by the tragic result of his gunfire.

"Hardly as bad as that! He's slowed down a lot before the crash came, you noticed. But I certainly do hope he's got a couple of gallons of stuff in that tank of his."

"And as for me," mumbled the other tagging just behind his leader, "I'm praying that I didn't puncture the tank, with all my shooting. I kept the fire low on purpose."

"We'll soon know, for here's the car close at hand!" snapped Tom.

It gave both of them a strange feeling to see the wrecked car at the side of the road, and realize that they were wholly responsible for it. But since coming to the front they had been in contact with so many things associated with war's horrors that the young American aviators had by degrees come to steel their hearts against any display of weakness.

Jack hurried around to the rear. His one thought was to learn whether his fears could be well grounded. If by any ill luck he had managed to hit the tank containing the liquid of which they stood in such need, of what avail would all this chase be?

Tom on his part turned to take a look at the man inside. There would be no time to spare to try to mend his wounds, but something seemed to draw him forward as with invisible cords. Afterwards Tom often asked himself how he could have attempted to struggle against this magnet that was causing him to pay attention to the man, when by rights all his thoughts should have been given to securing what they had come after.

He heard Jack give a yell of delight, and caught the words:

"It's all right, Tom! Never hurt the tank

in the least! And, say, I guess we're in great luck, because there are fully three gallons in it!"

Tom heard these exclamations, but they seemed to beat in his ears faintly. There was a reason for his attention being riveted in another quarter.

A strange thing had come to pass. He had arrived at the front of the wrecked car and leaned over the better to see within. After striking a small tree and cutting it clean off the heavy car had itself doubled up, so that it could never again be of any use save for the scrap heap. Such a blow was likely to give the occupant a severe jolt. Tom anticipated finding that the man had received bruises in plenty, and perhaps might also be suffering from a broken arm.

He thought he heard a perceptible groan as he came up, though the outcries from Jack rather put a damper on all other sounds. The leather covers had broken loose from the shock of the collision, and were flapping in the breeze. Tom put out his hand to drag them aside so that he might have an unobstructed view of the interior.

Just then a white face was protruded from within. Tom started as though he could not believe his eyes. It was uncanny—such a meeting, and under dramatic conditions at that!

For the face was that of the one man in all Germany whom he wanted to run across—no other than Adolph Tuessig, the spy who had robbed his father of his priceless invention, the secret of an airplane stabilizer!

CHAPTER XXV

MENTIONED FOR PROMOTION—CONCLUSION

Tom rubbed his eyes as though he thought he must be dreaming; but when he looked again he saw the same evil face and mocking eyes. Fancy what Adolph Tuessig on his part must have thought on discovering who it was to whom he owed his latest misfortune!

"What! You?" he gasped in bewilderment.

Tom grasped the true significance of the great good fortune that had come to him. It transcended his wildest dreams. There could have been but one chance in a billion of those two meetings as they did; and yet a strange fate had indeed brought it to pass.

"I've come for that paper you stole from my father, Adolph Tuessig!" Tom exclaimed.

At hearing these words Jack came bustling around from the rear of the car, his eyes wide open, and round with wonder.

"Well I never!" he managed to gasp.

The man who had been so strangely brought to bay seemed in a half daze. He stared at Tom as though unable to grasp the thing that had happened.

"Hand that paper over unless you want to give me the trouble of searching you!" ordered Tom firmly. "If I have to, I'll tear every stitch of your clothing off, to see if it's hidden under the lining somewhere. Do you hear what I'm saying?"

By degrees comprehension took the place of bewilderment on the man's face. He evidently realized that it was of little use trying to escape such a determined pursuer who could follow him even into the heart of hostile territory, and aboard an airplane at that. His courage deserted him, and he was ready to raise the white flag of surrender.

"I—I—haven't got—" he stammered.

"No nonsense, Tuessig! I want what you stole from my father. Hand it over, or I'll—" and Tom made a threatening gesture.

Adolph Tuessig shrank back. Evidently he was a coward at heart

"Yes, I have it here, so there is no need of your doing me any more bodily harm," he cried and gave a deep groan. "I'm bruised all over as it is, and may have received my death blow from this smash-up you drove me into."

"The paper first," Tom continued sternly. "After I have it in my hands I'll take a look at your hurts, and do anything I can to relieve your pain. Make haste, for we have yet far to go to get back home safely."

The man commenced to fumble at a secret inside pocket. Tom watched him closely, and kept his automatic pistol always in sight, lest the treacherous Tuessig think to get the better of him. Tom had a poor opinion of the man, it must be remembered. He believed that any one who would do the work of a German spy in a neutral country, and who could steal into a private house and rob a safe, would not be above any rank treachery.

"There is the paper I took from your father, boy!" said the groaning man, as he held something out to Tom.

One look convinced the youth he had actually succeeded in securing the important part of his father's precious invention. He sighed with happiness as his fingers closed over the paper, which he instantly transferred to a safe pocket.

"It was never any good to me, as it proved," continued Adolph Tuessig. "In the interest of the Fatherland I hoped to get my hands on the rest of the design, sooner or later, and on that account kept carrying this around with me, for it was useless to give it over to my superiors, only to be reprimanded for failure. I am glad to be rid of it, for ever since that night I have run into hard luck."

His continued groans made Tom fear the other might be injured more seriously than up

to that moment he had believed was the case.

"Jack, see if you can find some way to transfer that gas to our tank," he said at his chum. "I'll take a look at this man's hurts. Just at present there seems to be nothing in the way of danger around us, and we can spare a few minutes in the cause of humanity."

"You're treating him a hundred times better than he deserves," mumbled Jack. "If the tables were turned, and it was Tuessig who had you down, he'd never lift a finger to give you first-aid. But that's you, Tom, every time! I'll manage somehow to get this stuff aboard our plane, never fear."

So Tom hastened to look Adolph Tuessig over, being as gentle as the need of time would permit. He was soon satisfied that the other's injuries, while they might be exceedingly painful, were by no means mortal.

"You're going to come out of this fairly well," he told the man after completing his hasty but thorough examination. "There will be plenty of black and blue marks on your body, and your nose may never again be quite as shapely as it was, for I am sorry to tell you it is broken; but you've got lots to be thankful for. It might have been your neck, Adolph Tuessig."

Jack called out just then to explain that he

had managed to get the contents of the tank into a can that had been thrown out of the car at the time of the collision; and in which it could be readily transported to the airplane.

So they left the man, still grunting and groaning and looking very miserable. Tom concluded he need have no further occasion to harbor ill feeling against such a wretch, who had been so thoroughly repaid for all the mischief he had done in the Raymond family.

The air service boys soon had the gasolene aboard and were ready to start. Jack ran ahead to examine the character of the ground, and reported it excellent. Indeed, once the start had been given to the propellers, and Jack clambered aboard so that the pilot could let go, they trundled over the ground, and took to the air without any difficulty.

Both felt relieved now that they had a chance to fly once more. First of all it was their policy to mount to a high level, where they could hope to pass unnoticed over the numerous towns and villages that still lay in the route to the fighting front beyond the border.

Of course everything looked strange to them below. They could make out roads, and lines of rails over which laden trains were passing back and forth; but though Tom had a map of

Western Germany with him he could not recognize a thing.

They were heading right, at any rate, and if allowed to proceed a certain distance would surely strike their objective, the line where the rival armies lay in their trenches.

Jack had also managed to stop the tiny leak in their tank before they arose, which would help them greatly in conserving their store of fuel. Neither of them knew how many miles they must fly before reaching a friendly zone. It might be fifty, and it might only be fifteen; but as long as a drop of gasolene remained in their tank they meant to push steadily on.

Fortune was again kind to them, for in time they realized that they were nearing the scene of warfare. The dense clouds of smoke in the distance told them this, in the first place, and later on they occasionally caught the dull concussion of the big guns that rocked the earth every time they were discharged.

Now came the most critical time of all for the two young aviators. If their arrival on the scene of action chanced to be noticed in time, a flock of eager Fokker pilots would rise to intercept them. It would be hard indeed if, after surmounting all the difficulties that had beset their way thus far, they should be shot down when in sight of their goal.

Tom exercised due vigilance. At the same time he found himself gripped in a constant state of anxiety the nearer they drew to the battlelines.

Planes were in sight, many of them, and the sausage-shaped observation balloons swayed to and fro in double lines well back of the front. Tom endeavored to pick his way along carefully. He had Jack using the glass and searching the heavens to make out the identity of every machine in sight.

As before, it turned out that the nimble Nieuports were the ones doing "ceiling work," while far below a German, defended by a flock of aviatiks, was pushing forward, evidently intending to take a look at what the French were doing.

The strain was soon over. Down came several of the guard planes, after recognizing one of their own machines in the clumsy Caudron. Tom saw that the entire trio had the familiar Indian head painted on the body of the machines, showing that they were Americans. They knew of the absence of the two young airmen and were delighted to see them turn up after they had been given over as lost.

And so in due time Tom made as neat a landing in his own field as any veteran could have done, amid the cheers of scores and scores

of pilots, mechanicians and French soldiers, who came running like mad when they saw who was dropping from the skies.

Although utterly exhausted and almost frozen after their bitter experience, Tom and Jack could not retreat until they had shaken hands with dozens of the noisy throng that surrounded them. After that they were at least no longer cold, for their fingers had been squeezed, and hearty slaps laid on their backs by the excited aviators.

When later on they told their story, modestly enough, to be sure, and Tom held up the precious paper which he had recovered in such a miraculous fashion, they received a perfect ovation from the crowd.

Then, one day later on, the boys discovered to their great astonishment, and delight as well, that they had been cited in the Orders of the Day, each being awarded the coveted *Croix de Guerre,* and Tom being advanced to the grade of corporal in the French service, which for one so young was a very high honor indeed.

Of course, Tom took advantage of the first opportunity that arose to write a long account of their adventure and send it home, also enclosing the precious paper, after taking a copy of it to hold in case the original was lost in the mails. It may be said in passing that in due

time Mr. Raymond received this letter with its welcome enclosure, and never ceased to marvel at the remarkable manner in which his son had recovered the lost document.

After they had recovered from their strenuous journey the two young aviators were more than ever anxious for continued service. The taste of peril had sharpened their appetites, it seemed, and made them eager to meet with further exciting experiences in their chosen work.

All the members of the famous escadrille were very fond of the boys, and each seemed to deem it a privilege to coach them in the thousand and one problems that daily confront a war aviator.

Jack sometimes was seen to muse, as though his thoughts had taken a backward flight. Tom imagined he might be thinking of those at home, and once even exhibited more or less sympathy for his chum, when, to his surprise, and also amusement, Jack unblushingly admitted that the one he was thinking of chanced to be pretty little Bessie Gleason.

"It's a queer thing, Tom," he remarked, when the other chuckled, "but somehow I find myself wondering whether I'll ever run across that girl and her stern guardian again. Since you played in such great luck and pounced on Adolph Tuessig in such a remarkable way, per-

haps, who knows, I may find myself face to face with Bessie one of these days. Anyhow, I hope so."

"You never can tell," was all Tom would say in reply; and yet, if you read the second volume of this series, entitled "The Air Service Boys Over the Enemy's Lines; or, The German Spy's Secret," you will find that not only did Jack have his wish realized, but that a fresh and most astonishing array of thrilling happenings overtook the two chums while they were still "flying for France."

THE END.